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RTI On the Front Lines

Top 10 Lessons from the Trenches p.17

RTI and Preschool p.42



Utah Personnel Development Center

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ON THE COVER:

RTI on the Front Lines: matching instruction to student need. This issue of
the *Utah Special Educator* is dedicated to visionaries and practitioners
that have pioneered RTI in their state, district or school. RTI is about
ALL students doing better work.

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The Utah Special Educator is a symbol of the leadership of Dr. R. Elwood Pace
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Utah Professional Development 2007-2008 Calendar

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From The Editors...



It takes EVERY ED to teach a child

Michael Herbert, Editor

Ask a teacher what they do for a living, and most likely you will hear something like “I teach third grade, I teach preschool, I teach resource, I teach history (or math, health, science, PE.)” While technically correct, such descriptors are misleading and limited in their scope and importance. True, a preschool

teacher may teach sound/symbol relationships, but these relationships are the keys to unlocking the phonological code leading to reading, higher education, and vocational success. All teachers help to prepare children and youth for life. If teachers prepare students for “life,” to whose life do they model and teach to?

Did you know:

- In the next 8 seconds, 8 babies will be born; only 1 will be born in the USA
- In 2006, the USA will produce 1.3 million college graduates, compared to 3.1 million from India and 3.3 million from China.
- Today, the percentage of graduates from India who speak English is 100%
- In 9 years, the number one English speaking country will be China
- Today's learners will have 10 to 14 jobs by their 38th birthday
- Many of today's college majors did not exist 10 years ago (new media, organic agriculture, e-business, nanotechnology)

What will today's students study 10 years from now?

Today's 21 year olds have:

- Watched 20,000 hours of TV
- Played 10,000 hours of video games
- Talked 10,000 hours on the phone
- Sent/received 250,000 e-mails
- Created content on the web (>50%)

More than 70% of 4 year olds have used a computer

We are preparing students for jobs and technologies that don't yet exist...in order to solve problems that we don't even know are problems yet. (Adapted from Did You Know, www.shifthappens.wikispaces.com)

“We can't solve problems using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” —Albert Einstein

Like it or not, the world is changing, exponentially. Personally, I like change...as long as I don't have to do anything differently.

I attended a conference this past summer on Closing the Achievement Gap. It was well attended, yet, many in attendance were just learning about Response to Intervention (RTI). One teacher pulled me aside and asked: “This all sounds interesting, but certainly no one in Utah is practicing RTI are they?” Later that day, after the sessions were over, I saw a colleague of mine sitting with this same teacher, who was practically in tears. Shift happened, and this teacher was left behind. Plan now for this shift, as change is not optional.

No Child Left Behind... except Maria, Julio, Fred, Mary...

Does your school have a vision statement? Does it sound something like: all kids can learn, respect for kids and parents...? Put your school's vision statement to the test. Words are nice, but what matters most is action. The real test of a good vision statement would be if the vision statement were backed up by daily action by ALL staff. I am currently coaching a rural school district in their initial efforts to implement RTI. One school of strong teachers took up the challenge, designed and implemented a solid Tier 2 program. This was truly a collaborative effort between administration, regular education, special education, alternative language teachers and dedicated paraprofessionals. After only one year, they were rewarded with excellent results. One element key to this effort was compiling and posting the names and photos of each and every child in this school, and whether they were proficient, strategic or intensive in their reading needs. Educators were encouraged to visit this often, and to see the names and photos of each and every child, not just children in their class, but every child in their school who had previously been left behind. Teachers began saying “hello” to these children on the playground, in lunch line, in the halls, waiting for the bus, and giving them encouragement and positives for their hard work and progress. Student achievement increased as EVERY ED in this school adopted every child as their own. The motto of the school effectively changed from “all children can learn, to all children WILL learn.

It truly takes EVERY ED to teach a child.

“We can, whenever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.”

—Ron Edmonds, 1982 in DeFour, et. al. 2004 ■

RTI On the Front Lines

Amber Roderick-Landward, Guest Co-Editor

Response to Intervention is both a way of thinking about teaching children and a way to approach doing it in a very systematic way. With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal government required schools to use scientifically research-based instruction to the greatest extent possible. What the federal government did not account for in this mandate is that there are not structures in place in most schools to deliver these interventions efficiently and effectively. In a nutshell, that is what RTI allows us to do. It sets up a logical set of structures that allow teachers and administrators to systematically vary the nature and intensity of instruction for children based on their needs. It allows them to monitor the effectiveness of this instruction, to keep implementing things that are effective and to change things that are not. In short, it allows us to bring science-based practices into our schools in a logical and rational way.

who struggle, RTI schools systematically monitor students' performance over time to determine if instruction is working for these individual students. In cases where things are working, successful strategies can be retained. In cases where student learning does not significantly respond, instruction can be changed.



As schools go about implementing RTI, they generally go through three phases. In the first phase, called consensus building, everyone in the school studies RTI practices to learn what practices are required as well as the benefits and costs. When a majority of people in schools agree that the benefits of implementing RTI will likely outweigh the costs, they move into the second phase of implementation: infrastructure building. All schools that begin implementing RTI already have some RTI components in place. And all schools that begin implementing RTI also have some new practices to learn and incorporate into their current practices. The infrastructure-building phase is about identifying new practices that are needed and building the skills and structures needed to deploy them. The third and final phase of RTI implementation is implementation itself. Once all of the structures are in place, schools then spend time refining and figuring out the most efficient ways of implementing RTI practices in their school.

One of the most striking characteristics of schools implementing RTI is that many of the historical silos that exist in many schools because of the ways we structured things in the past go away. The idea that there are "your kids and my kids" usually goes away. They all become "our kids." The historical divisions between general and special education break down and all students receive the instruction they need. That is not to say that special education does not play a significant part in RTI schools, it does. It is just that RTI is not about General Education, RTI is not about Special Education, and RTI is not about Talented and Gifted or ELL. RTI is about Every Education and about providing a mechanism for effective instruction for all of our students.

RTI practices are applied in both reading and behavioral areas, with emerging information in mathematics. Data from implementation sites both locally and across the country have demonstrated that when implemented with fidelity, RTI practices can make a huge difference in the learning of large numbers of children.

This issue of the *Utah Special Educator*; RTI On the Front Lines is designed to give you a deeper look at what is going on nationally and locally as we walk on the battlefield together to continually fight for improving outcomes for ALL students. ■



There are a series of critical components of RTI that are implemented in every RTI school. How they are implemented will vary, but every RTI school implements these practices in one way or another. These components include having a range of instructional options available for all students including core instruction, supplemental instruction and intensive instruction. RTI schools also conduct universal screenings three times a year in basic skills areas for their students. These screenings objectively measure the extent to which students are successfully learning. In RTI schools, when students struggle, their teachers have formative diagnostic assessments in place to help determine "why" it is that these students may be struggling. These data can then be used to match specific supplemental or intensive instruction to student learning needs. Finally, schools that implement RTI practices acknowledge that we can't predict with certainty what will work for students prior to trying it. So, especially for students



When Special Education Goes too Easy on Students, Parents Say Schools Game System Let Kids Graduate without Skills

GREENPORT, N.Y. — On June 25, 2006, Michael Bredemeyer threw his tasseled cap in the air and cheered after getting his high school diploma. Two days later, his parents mailed the diploma back.

Michael, now 19 years old, has learning disabilities and finished high school at a seventh-grade reading level, despite scoring above average on IQ tests. The Bredemeyers say he passed some classes because teachers inflated his grades and accepted poor work. By awarding him a meaningless diploma, they say, school officials avoided paying for ongoing instruction.

"I felt proud because he had worked so hard," says Michael's mother, Beverly, her voice breaking. "You don't want to take that away from him. But you knew it wasn't real. What's he going to do in the future? Will he be able to go to college and get a job?"

The Bredemeyers represent a new voice in special education: parents disappointed not because their children are failing, but because they're passing without learning. These families complain that schools give their children an easy academic ride through regular education classes, undermining a new era of higher expectations for the 14% of U.S. students who are in special education.

Years ago, schools assumed that students with disabilities would lag behind their non-disabled peers. They often were taught in separate buildings and left out of standardized testing. But a combination of two federal laws, adopted a quarter-century apart, have made it national policy to hold almost all children with disabilities to the same academic standards as other students.

The 1975 statute now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act promoted putting special education students in mainstream classrooms. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act said schools would be punished if disabled children don't pass the same state tests as other students. It also requires states to set standards for high school graduation rates and meet them for all students, including those with disabilities.

By some measures, the extra attention is paying off. Test scores and classroom grades of disabled students are rising, and their high school graduation rate increased to 54% in 2004 from 42% in 1996.

But critics say some of the gains have come because schools have learned to game the system. For instance, federal rules allow states to make "reasonable accommodations" to help disabled students pass tests and graduate, such as allowing extra time on exams. Some schools, say critics, are giving students too much help, for instance by guiding students to the right answers on multiple choice tests.

From 2000 to 2005, special education fourth graders showed more improvement in reading and math than the general population on an important benchmark test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. But accommodations also increased. In 2005, 70% of fourth-grade special education students received some sort of accommodation while taking the math portion, up from 44% five years earlier. In reading, 63% used accommodations in 2005, up from 29% in 2000.

On tests used to measure compliance with No Child Left Behind, more states are permitting students with disabilities to use calculators on arithmetic tests or have reading comprehension tests be read aloud. Massachusetts education commissioner David Driscoll warned school administrators in February that an alarming number of special education students—a quarter or half in some cases—were receiving such accommodations on state exams. With unclear guidelines, "People start driving trucks through loopholes," he said in an interview.

Some school districts have an informal policy against failing students with disabilities even if they miss many classes or aren't learning. "I can go into any school we represent and have somebody tell me we have to pass special education students" to avoid being blamed for not providing the right services if students fail, says Janet Horton, a Texas special education attorney. Federal law says special education students should receive a "free appropriate public education," but it doesn't prohibit failing them.

Mardys Leeper and Carol Merrill, former teachers at West Philadelphia High School in Pennsylvania, say a special education administrator there ordered them to pass special education students. Ms. Leeper says she made concessions for students with disabilities, such as letting them write shorter essays or copy paragraphs she wrote onto a word processor rather than composing their own. But when those students didn't make an effort, or skipped class, both teachers say they sometimes sought to fail them—only to have the administrator insist on passing grades. The reason they were given: Students had met the goals of their federally mandated individual education plans, IEPs, spelling out goals and services for each special education student.

"Students who weren't even participating, even trying, we couldn't fail them," says Ms. Merrill, an English teacher who retired this year. Even if they couldn't read, "I had to give them a 'D.'"

The administrator couldn't be reached for comment. Brenda Taylor, head of special education for the Philadelphia school district, called the matter a "breakdown in communication." The district has no written policy against failing special education students, she says. But rather than being "punitive" if a student performs poorly or cuts class, she says, the district prefers to revise a student's IEP. "We're not in the business of failing students," Ms. Taylor says.

Only 19 states require all students to earn the same kind of diploma, according to a recent University of Minnesota survey. Some of those states let special education students amass fewer course credits to earn the degree, the survey found. Other states give substitute certificates, in some cases called IEP diplomas, to special-education students who don't qualify for standard diplomas.

Many special education parents are happy to see their children advance through school and graduate. Reggie Felton, director of federal policy for the National School Boards Association, says special education students learn more in regular classes even if they're given a break on assignments or grading. The federal government recently decided to triple the percentage of students allowed to take easier tests, to 3% from 1%. Some legislators have proposed exempting more students.

But the rebellion against too easy passing is growing, says Pam Wright, who with her husband has co-authored books on special education issues and operates a Virginia-based information clearinghouse for special education parents. She estimates she now receives more than 1,000 email messages a year from parents lamenting that their children with disabilities take mainstream courses but aren't being taught as much as their classmates. Dozens of parents have contended in recent administrative appeals that their children did not deserve the diplomas they received, she says.

The family of Alba Somoza, who has cerebral palsy and speaks only with the help of a computer, filed one such case. Alba drew national attention in the 1990s when her family successfully pushed to include the then-third grader in a regular classroom. Then President Bill Clinton backed her cause, and Alba, now 23, graduated with honors from a New York City high school in 2002.

Last year, Alba and her family filed an administrative case claiming her education was a sham. A school report prepared weeks before she graduated showed she had language and math skills at an elementary school level, court records show. "You cannot shunt children through—you cannot scam them through the system," says Alba's mother, Mary.

Since shortly after she graduated, New York has been paying for a special program for Alba that costs \$400,000 a year—including a full-time teacher, an aide, transportation and extensive technology. The city says it is doing so out of compassion, not legal obligation. The family is seeking to continue the public funding another year to help Alba receive enough education to work as a museum docent.

The Somozas lost the administrative case, but a judge in U.S. District Court in Manhattan ruled in the family's favor earlier this year and ordered another hearing. Rather than develop a program that would help Alba reach her academic goals, teachers lowered the curriculum's "level of difficulty" and removed "large and meaningful portions of its substantive content," the judge said.

Continued on page 8

One teacher testified that he did most of the work on Alba's final project in 2002. New York officials say the school properly adapted the curriculum for a severely disabled student.

In northern California, Jennifer McGowan, an 18-year-old who is deaf in one ear and suffers from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities, was supposed to graduate from Vacaville Unified School District in June. She didn't get her diploma—because her family won a court injunction to stop it.

In an interview, Jennifer said she often received A or B grades for poorly completed work or, at times, when she didn't do assignments at all or show up for class. Achievement tests she took in January 2005 showed that she had the math and reading skills of an elementary school student, according to her administrative complaint.

The school district denies her grades were inflated and said she showed her proficiency by passing a high school exit exam. John Aycock, Vacaville's superintendent, said teachers did "a great job working with Jennifer." Jennifer says she failed the exit exam several times despite intensive preparation. "They just wanted to pass me and let me fly by," she says. The school system says it's not unusual to make several attempts to pass.

At the Mercer Island School District in Washington state, the family of a girl with severe learning disabilities complains that, instead of the intense instruction she needed to master reading and math in eighth and ninth grades, teachers showered her with accommodations: a peer note-taker, a peer to read materials to her, oral exams, reduced assignments and a calculator on math tests.

At an administrative hearing, the family—whose names are not disclosed in the court papers—sought to force the school system to pay for her private schooling. Noting her strong A and B grades, the district successfully argued that accommodations were helping her learn. In U.S. District Court in Seattle, a judge hearing an appeal of the case disagreed last year, saying the system improperly relied on accommodations rather than instruction, and has returned the case to a hearing officer to determine financial relief for the family.

Boxes of school correspondence and Michael Bredemeyer's old tests and assignments line the hallways of his family's weather-beaten saltbox house in Orient, N.Y., on Long Island's North Fork. Michael's parents are demanding public funding for more services until age 21, to which students are entitled unless they graduate, so he can improve his academic skills for college.

John Bredemeyer, a county public health inspector, and his wife, Beverly, had high hopes for Michael, who has a strong work ethic and a knack for repairing machines. But once he entered public middle school in nearby Greenport, his parents worried that teachers were letting him skate through classes and tests.

Michael, who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities including dyslexia, says in some classes he "definitely earned" a passing grade, but others were "borderline." He took regular classes except for one period a day. "A little more one-on-one" instruction would have helped, he says.

On state achievement exams, Michael's IEP permitted him extra time, simplified instructions and guidance from a teacher to slow him down if he rushed through answers. But when he completed the eighth-grade math test, his special-education teacher also took him to the resource room and directed him to redo problems he had answered incorrectly. According to a memo

from Greenport Superintendent Charles Kozora, the teacher "exceeded the intent" of Michael's accommodations, boosting his score. The state investigated and invalidated Michael's test.

Mr. Kozora said the school system had only two cases of testing irregularities in six years, few conflicts with parents over special education and "many successes" among students with disabilities. The district says achievement, and not cost, dictates its decisions on graduating students.

When Michael was a junior at Greenport High, his chemistry teacher passed him with the minimum grade of 65, even though he says he spent much of the class doodling and playing solitaire on his laptop. Checking his assignments and tests, his parents couldn't understand how he could be passing.

In a letter, the school principal acknowledged that the final grade was a "miscalculation" and should have been 56.6, or an F. The school offered to let him make up his lost credits by volunteering in the town library. When his parents balked, he was instead placed in courses in sociology and psychology. On one psychology pop quiz, five of Michael's seven answers were marked wrong, but a failing grade was crossed out on the paper and a passing score of 65 was substituted. The school district declined comment.

For a senior English assignment, he received an A for one untitled paragraph. "I believe competition today has changed dramatically," he wrote. "Back in the day, sports was some of the only sports that had competition. Today, everyone wants to compete and only be successful. School work, school sports, major league sports, all involve high amounts of success and competition. Competition today has become very extreme." His English teacher, Michael Connolly, said he didn't remember the assignment and had no comment on the grade.

On standardized tests, Michael had mixed results: On the SATs, which have a 200 to 800 scale, Michael received 330 and then 370 in two tries on the reading test, in the bottom 10% of all students nationally. On math, he scored 460 both times. He failed two state exams and passed five others. His school grades put him in the bottom one-third of his class.

A month before graduation, the Bredemeyers debated whether he should accept the degree. "I wanted to have it," Michael says. "Get it and forget it."

On graduation day, a school band played "Pomp and Circumstance." Michael's parents, his sister, his grandmother, aunts and uncles watched as he walked up to the podium and a school official handed him a purple diploma case with his name etched in gold letters.

Michael says he knew his parents might not let him keep it. "I had a feeling they'd do something like that," he said, shrugging. "I'll eventually get it back, one of these days, months, years." This summer, Michael has been mowing lawns and picking up trash at a state park for \$9 an hour. This fall, he plans to enter his second year at Suffolk County Community College, which does not require a high-school diploma. Last semester at Suffolk, he received a D-plus in freshman composition, D's in statistics and Western Civilization and an F in the history of rock 'n' roll.

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Exploring RTI

Exploring RTI: Conceptual Confusion within Response-to-Intervention Vernacular: Clarifying Meaningful Differences

NASP Communiqué, Vol. #3 November 2005

The *Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act* of 2004 states that a local education agency “may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures” (Pub. L. No. 108-446 § 614 [b][6][A]; § 614 [b][2 & 3]). This is commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI) and represents a substantive departure from traditional diagnostic and subsequent resource allocation in the 30 years since the discrepancy model was first operationalized in federal regulations. The traditional discrepancy model approach to learning disability (LD) diagnosis has experienced widespread criticism (Aaron, 1997; Fletcher et al., 1998) due to many factors, including inconsistent implementation (Haight, Patriarcha, & Burns, 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002), failure to differentiate low achievement from LD (Fletcher et al., 1998), and a lack of treatment validity (Aaron, 1997). As a result the Office of Special Education Programs conducted an LD Summit in 2001 to examine LD diagnostic procedures. RTI was presented as one alternative approach to the discrepancy model (Gresham, 2001) and was later endorsed by the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) and by several professional organizations (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003).

Although the explicit inclusion of RTI in federal special education law is a recent event, RTI has existed in the field for many years (Fuchs et al., 2003). Existing RTI models that were implemented on a large-scale basis demonstrated strong and positive effects (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, in press), but some important inconsistencies among them were noted (Burns & Ysseldyke, in press). A review of the literature and many professional discussions reveal that there are meaningful subtleties in the RTI vernacular that have the potential to confuse professionals and negatively affect implementation. The purpose of this paper is to propose clarifications to the language related to four separate issues: a) RTI-problem solving vs. RTI standard protocol; b) response vs. resistance to intervention; c) response vs. responsiveness to intervention; and d) response to instruction vs. intervention.

RTI-Problem-Solving vs. RTI-Standard Protocol

Problem-solving (PS) is a general term that describes any set of activities designed to “eliminate the difference between ‘what is’ and ‘what should be’ with respect to student development” (Deno, 2002; p. 38). In contrast, *RTI* refers to any set of activities designed to evaluate the affect of instruction,

or intervention, on student achievement. RTI is an approach to evaluate a student’s response to an ecological context of instruction and/or intervention. We propose that the terms RTI and PS each represent distinct processes which may converge, but are not synonymous. PS is a systematic process designed to *change student outcomes*. RTI is a systematic process to determine *whether change has occurred* and under what conditions.

Fuchs et al. (2003) described two groups of RTI advocates: early interventionists who advocate for standardized and validated treatment protocols (Standard Protocol; RTI-SP) and behaviorally-oriented school psychologists who see RTI as synonymous with problem-solving (RTI-PS). While the conceptual distinction between the two approaches is sound, the language is confusing because the contrast implies that RTI-SP is somehow distinct from, or inconsistent with, problem solving. On the contrary, both RTI-SP and RTI-PS can fit within a problem solving framework. *The fundamental difference between RTI-SP and RTI-PS is the level of individualization and depth of problem analysis that occurs prior to the selection, design, and implementation of an intervention.* Because the difference between the two RTI approaches is not related to their potential applications within a problem solving framework, it is confusing to label one approach as PS.

Continued on page 10



In an RTI-SP application, a standard set of empirically supported instructional approaches are implemented to prevent and remediate academic problems. Such approaches might include partnered reading activities, direct instruction of phonological or phonics skills, or reinforcement of skills through computer programs (Case, Speece, & Molloy, 2003). A key feature of RTI-SP is that standard instruction/intervention protocols are used with minimal analysis of the deficit skill (e.g., Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2005). In contrast, RTI-PS is a more flexible process with an emphasis on individualized interventions that derive from the analysis of instructional/environmental conditions and skill deficits (Tilly, Reschly, & Grimes, 1999). RTI-PS is guided by a systematic analysis of instructional variables that is designed to isolate target skill/sub-skill deficits and shape targeted interventions (Barnett, Daly, Jones & Lentz, 2004). Procedural problem analysis examples include the functional assessment of academic skills (Daly et al., 1996; Daly et al., 1999; Daly et al., 1997) and Curriculum-Based Evaluation (Heartland AEA 11, 2000; Howell & Nolet, 2000; Upah, 2002).

Neither RTI-SP nor RTI-PS is more consistent with the spirit of problem solving as described by Deno (2002) in that both RTI applications are designed to reach the same goal, which is the reduction or elimination of an academic problem. The difference is the analysis of instructional/environmental conditions associated with RTI-PS (Barnett et al., 2004). Behavioral consultation literature refers to this identification of environmental conditions that are directly related to the referral problem in order to design and implement interventions as *problem analysis* (Kratonchwill & Bergan, 1990; Tilley, 2002). Thus, instead of perpetuating a false dichotomy between the two RTI applications, RTI-PS should be replaced with RTI-problem analysis (RTI-PA). The distinction between the RTI procedures persists, but the alternate language is less likely to spur confusion.

While RTI-PA and RTI-SP are distinct, these procedures can be combined as part of a larger problem solving system, or what some researchers have termed a *progressive intervention* approach (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2003). A progressive intervention approach typically includes primary (Phase I), secondary (Phase 2), and tertiary (Phase 3) levels of instruction and/or intervention. Each successive level is associated with a more intensive level of treatment and allocation of additional resources to solve the problem. That is, RTI-SP is more likely to be used during the initial intervention phases to prevent and/or remediate less severe problems before they have the potential to establish disabling conditions. RTI-PA/RTI-PS applications can then be reserved for the more persistent and atypical problems, which would typically correspond with the problems that were not resolved by standard interventions. This conception is consistent with the problem solving and resource allocation models presented by Tilly (2002).

Response vs. Resistance

The “R” in RTI may represent either response/responsiveness or resistance/non-responsiveness to intervention (although there may be slight distinctions, resistance and non-responsiveness will be used interchangeably). The distinction between response and resistance paradigms is important because the purpose, procedures, and conclusions of each process are distinct. The resistance model is diagnostically focused whereas a response model is intervention focused.

Gresham (2001) stated that “a *resistance-to-intervention* approach to eligibility determination identifies students as having a learning disability if their academic performance in relevant areas does not change in response to a validated intervention implemented with integrity.” Within a resistance-to-intervention model, a student is diagnosed and/or deemed eligible for services based on his/her *lack of response to specific interventions*. As part of the resistance to intervention diagnostic process, empirically supported

interventions are selected and implemented to determine whether an individual is resistant to “effective” interventions. When resistance is the focus, the emphasis of the process is to determine whether there is some within-child deficit, deficiency, disorder, or disability that impedes achievement, or a within-child deficit that warrants a diagnosis of disability (Mann, 1979). Services are conferred based on an evaluation process that is designed to determine the conditions from which a child does not benefit. The process is most likely to terminate with diagnosis when the evaluation team determines that some specified set of procedures does not work.

Individuals who respond are deemed ineligible for special education-related resources and individuals who fail to respond are deemed resistant, and considered in need of special education resources. The paradox of the resistance model is that it could fail both responders and non-responders/resistant students. School resources are often too limited to provide ongoing services to students who would be ineligible to benefit from special education-related resources *based on their response to an intervention*. Once effective instructional conditions are identified for the responder group, they often are placed back into general education without sufficient support for ongoing effective instruction. Moreover, the students who do not respond to instruction are deemed eligible based on what does not work instead of what does work. In effect, the assessment fails to inform special education service delivery.

Gresham (2001) described a response-to-intervention model that “comes from the applied behavior analysis (ABA) camp, which offers a *functional* rather than a *structural* explanation for children’s academic difficulties—that is, understanding academic failure attempts to relate academic performance to environmental events” (p. 7). Although Gresham did not label the distinction between the two models as response- versus resistance/non-responsiveness-to-intervention, he offered the definitions that help clarify the distinction between the two models. Within a response-to-intervention model, a student is diagnosed and/or deemed eligible to access special education related resources based on his/her response to intervention, which is used to determine his/her instructional needs. As part of the response to intervention process, empirically supported interventions are selected and implemented to determine what set of instructional conditions most benefits the student. When response is the focus, the emphasis of the process is to determine what set of conditions the student needs to benefit from instruction. The process is designed to first identify the set of conditions that benefit the child and then determine whether services should be provided using general education or special education resources. Thus, the response model is more of a *resource allocation* method than a diagnostic tool because diagnosis is secondary to the primary determination of what benefits the student.

Unlike the paradoxical approach of resistance models, which place diagnosis before instructional decisions, *response models place instructional decisions before diagnosis*. This should not imply that response models are inconsistent with diagnostically orientated eligibility decisions. On the contrary, response models are premised on the recognition that the identification of effective treatments precedes and supersedes categorical labels. The process of assessment and evaluation does not terminate until the conditions for response are established. Subsequently, the *magnitude of resources* necessary to meet the individual’s needs is used to guide diagnostic decisions and inform ongoing treatment.

Response vs. Responsiveness

The “R” in RTI may also represent either *response* or *responsiveness* to intervention. A review of the professional literature suggested that when “responsiveness” was used in place of “response,” the authors were referring to a within-child phenomenon, much like the distinction between response and resistance. For example, in a recent article Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2004) proposed that, “students are identified as LD when their response to

generally effective instruction (i.e., instruction to which most student respond) is dramatically inferior to that of their peers...If a child is nonresponsive to instruction that benefits a majority of students...it suggests that disability is responsible and that specialized intervention is necessary" (p. 217).

This response and responsiveness distinction might seem subtle, but its implications are significant. Research literature that used the term "response," as opposed to "responsiveness," referred to a process of inductive hypothesis testing to low-inference phenomena (Barnett et al., 2004). Thus, a response to intervention approach emphasizes ecological manipulations that promote achievement without any unwarranted attention to within-child causation. Such is more consistent with the principles of behavioral analysis and the experimental discipline of school psychology that is described by Reschly and Ysseldyke (2002). In contrast, the responsiveness to intervention approach emphasizes discovering whether there is a within-child cause. Such is more consistent with hypothetical deductions and high level inferences that are associated with a less experimental correlational discipline (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002).

Instruction vs. Intervention

The "I" in RTI within the literature usually stands for one of two possibilities, either instruction or intervention. Speece, Case, and Molloy (2003) described RTI procedures where an individual's response was evaluated in the context of general education reading instruction, which is akin to when student performance is evaluated against standards/benchmarks of expected performance subsequent to instruction. This evaluation of a child's response to typical instruction can be used to guide resource allocation decisions and determine which individuals should be considered for more intensive instructional procedures. *Response to instruction* is the referent when procedures are designed to evaluate a students' response to typical instruction and/or slightly modified/intensive instruction. These procedures typically correspond with primary (Phase I) and secondary (Phase 2) levels of a multi-tiered model.

In contrast, Barnett et al. (2004) described RTI procedures where an individual's response was evaluated in the context of a highly modified and intensive set of instructional conditions. When typical instructional procedures are highly modified, then the services comprise an *intervention*, and the referent is *response to intervention*. Thus, "response-to-instruction" refers to response to core instruction or universal programming, whereas "response-to-intervention" refers to a student's response to a substantially modified set of instructional procedures that are distinct from universal programming (Salvia & Ysseldyke, in press).

The distinction between response to instruction and intervention amounts to the intervention *and* evaluation activities. While it is difficult to define the parameters for what is typical, modified, and/or highly modified instruction, the more fundamental difference between response to instruction versus intervention is the frequency and use of assessment data to evaluate response (Salvia & Ysseldyke, in press). With an RTI approach, assessment may occur in either a continuous, periodic (e.g., occurring 3-10 times per year), or annual (1 time per year) schedule. When evaluating response to instruction, the purpose of assessment is to evaluate general program effectiveness for the group and identify individuals who will need or benefit from more intensive instruction. As the intensity of an instruction increases so should the density of the assessment schedule. Thus, a response to intervention approach requires both intensive, substantially modified instruction *and* intensive assessment and evaluation to monitor, evaluate, and modify interventions as necessary to ensure effect.

Core instruction is for all students; enhanced instruction is for some students; and intensive instruction (i.e., intervention) is for only a few

students (Salvia & Ysseldyke, in press). In a multi-tiered framework, assessment and evaluation activities become more frequent, or formative, with the progression from primary to secondary and to the tertiary level of instruction and intervention. At the tertiary level, frequent and direct measurements of student response are used to guide ongoing development and evaluation of intervention activities in response to the individual student (Barnett et al., 2004).

Conclusions

LD was first operationalized in federal regulations in 1977, but federal funding for research to examine the diagnostic process for LD did not occur until the early 1980s (Burns & Ysseldyke, in press). Thus, the practical application of the LD model was not adequately examined until after it was implemented. As a result, inconsistencies in practice were common, and the diagnostic process was heavily criticized for the widespread inconsistencies in implementation. RTI is at risk for sharing a similar fate if there is not a concerted effort to establish shared language and improved dissemination of procedures for the implementation of existing models (Ysseldyke, 2005). The goal of the current article is to propose language that will reduce the potential for confusion as research is conducted and policy decisions are made.

In the proposed language, we advocate the use of **RTI-PA** (i.e., RTI-problem-analysis) in place of RTI-PS (i.e., RTI-problem-solving). We advocate that the term "**response**" is more closely aligned with an intervention-linked assessment and evaluation, and that such terms as "resistance" and "responsiveness" are more diagnostically oriented. We believe that it is important that the context and services be evaluated in reference to the child's response rather than the child evaluated in reference to the context and services. Regardless of individual beliefs, the appropriate language should be used to promote a clear understanding of the paradigm. Finally, we find that the distinction between response to "instruction" versus "intervention" reflects the intensity and typicality of instruction and evaluation activities. When taken together, these proposed definitions establish a foundation to communicate more clearly and use language more consistently.

References available upon request from the Utah Personnel Development Center

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Wouldn't You

Frequently Asked Questions about RTI



The answers to the following questions were comprised from published resources, presentations, and/or personal communications with the noted author(s) or organizations. The answers are not absolutes and should be considered as recommendations and guidelines.

Is RTI another way of doing pre-referral?

NO! Pre-referral suggests that you are referring to something! RTI is not about special education; RTI is about helping children find success in their education. While it is true that some students will need special education to become successful, participating in RTI does not in any way imply that a student may be on their way to special education. RTI is about solving kids' problems in general education. RTI is about "Really Terrific Instruction." Period!

W. David Tilly; Heartland AEA 11, Iowa

Can RTI be used beyond elementary school?

Although the primary focus of Response to Intervention (RTI) in practice has been on children in kindergarten through third grade, the law extends RTI through twelfth grade. While it is urgent to intervene as early as possible in the early grades to prevent the cycle of failure, it is equally important to remember that struggling learners in middle school and high school are also in need of instructional and behavioral supports to be successful.

Dr. Kathleen A. Whitmire; National Center for Learning Disabilities

What is the difference between a standard treatment protocol and a problem solving model and which one is better?

The main difference between the two approaches lies in how instructional decisions and placements are made and in the number of interventions used with individual students. The problem solving approach focuses on matching instruction to student need by determining as a team what the problem is, why it is occurring, what should be done about it, and whether or not it worked. The problem solving model is most often applied to individual kids but is also effective with assessing the needs of students on a larger scale (grade, school, etc.). The standard treatment protocol focuses on providing a specific research based intervention for students with similar difficulties in a standardized format to ensure fidelity of implementation. This method is preferred by researchers and is more often used for the sole purpose of identifying learning disabilities. *Dr. John Hosp, Florida State University*

Like to Know...

If a child is receiving intensive interventions (Tier 3) and is non-responsive, what would change instructionally if the child receives special education services? In other words, what will be special about special ed?

There are instructional approaches that have yielded significant outcomes for students with LD. Research-based practices that are effective for the special education of students with LD are well-specified, explicit, carefully designed, and relate closely to the area of instructional need (e.g., reading, spelling, math). Torgesen specified that how special education differs from general education for students with LD is that it is more (a) explicit, (b) intensive, and (c) supportive.

Dr. Sharon Vaughn, University of Texas, Austin

So what should be special about special education for students with LD?

In most cases, it will not be the content. We want students with disabilities to have access to the same curriculum including higher-order processing skills and problem solving as their non-disabled peers. What should be special is the delivery of instruction since their needs are rarely met through general education instruction alone. We know that students benefit from explicit and systematic instruction that is closely related to their area of instructional need.

Dr. Sharon Vaughn, University of Texas, Austin

But how much additional instruction do students need and in what format?

We know less about the effect of variables such as group size, duration, and intensity although recent research in this area is promising. As we begin to gather evidence of how these variables interact, we may have to think about not only how we deliver instruction and who delivers instruction to students at-risk for and with LD, but also about the extent to which schools will be able to implement and sustain a new way of doing special education.

Dr. Sharon Vaughn, University of Texas, Austin

What does the re-evaluation in special

education look like in a RTI model?

Students with IEPs are re-evaluated to determine what constitutes an appropriate educational program. RTI data about a student's progress in meeting IEP goals, the discrepancy from peers and what environment is appropriate to meet the instructional needs are reviewed. The criteria used in a re-evaluation are the same as those applied at the time of initial identification.

Batsche, et. al; Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation

How long should interventions continue before a student is referred for eligibility for special education services?

The length of time that interventions should be continued in special education prior to special education referral should be based on student performance data, not a specified time period. Sufficient time must be provided in order to determine if the intervention is going to work and to close the gap between the student and his/her peers. The greater the gap the more time that will be required to help the student reach benchmark expectations. For students to be eligible for special education, they must both have a disability and need special education. If a student does not make acceptable rates of progress in spite of the provision of scientifically based supplemental and intensive instruction in general education, the evidence has been collected that may justify further evaluation to determine if the child has a disability and needs special education.

Dr. Judy Elliott; Portland Public Schools

What is the relationship between RTI and AYP?

There is a direct and positive relationship between RTI and AYP. AYP is a measure of students' academic and behavior proficiency. RTI aligns students' educational needs with scientifically based instruction in general education. Assessing students' performance and adjusting instruction based on response increases the likelihood of positive outcomes. Improved proficiency is reflected in the school's AYP measures.

Hollie Pettersson, Utah Personnel Development Center

The Utah Personnel Development Center will be collecting and compiling more questions and answers regarding RTI. These will be available in the near future at: www.updc.org

**Ben Barbour, Special Education Coordinator
Supervisor of Psychology Services,
Horry County Schools, South Carolina**

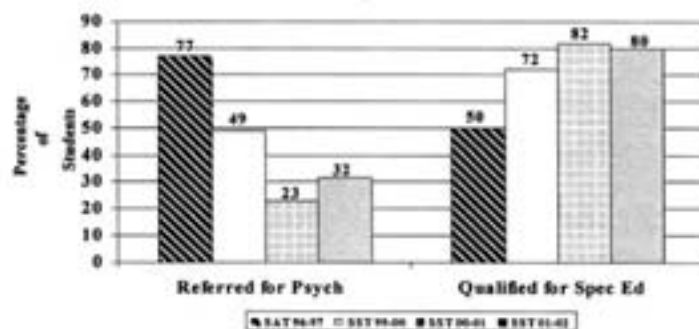
Background:

Horry County Schools (District) is the third largest school district in South Carolina with 51 schools, academies and learning centers. Located on the coast with a student population of over thirty-seven thousand, the district began researching the use of a problem-solving model after the passage of the 1997 IDEA Re-Authorization. At that time, the primary goal was to find a replacement procedure for the district's ineffective pre-referral process. Although initiated with the best of intentions, these Student Assistance Teams (SATs) had sometimes become a one way trip to special education placement. A spring audit by the Department of Special Education had revealed that the SATs district-wide tended to confuse "interventions" with accommodations. Also less than 50% of students recommended by the teams actually met state eligibility criteria for receiving special education services. Such information dictated a change in practice.

Starting in the summer of 1998, a team was formed to research models of general education intervention from a variety of sources including numerous state departments of education. The problem-solving model employed by the state of Iowa was one practice that the district decided to learn more about. What followed was 18 months of researching and

directly observing the model by means of several trips to an Area Education Agency (AEA) in northern Iowa. This problem-solving approach as applied to education is now commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI).

Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics Before and After Implementation of Problem Solving Model



The next three years were spent implementing a general education, problem-solving model in three K-5 pilot schools. These schools were selected on the basis of district representation in the areas of racial diversity, social economic status, free and reduced lunch, and geographic location. After three years of pilot implementation, permission from the S.C. State Board of Education was petitioned and granted to expand the RTI paradigm to include all K-5 schools (n=22).



Engaging the RTI: Experiences in LEA Implementation

District-wide Implementation:

In the last five years, the RTI model has been used as a general education intervention tool to address students' needs. In the past two years, the district has included middle schools (n=11) to build on the success experience in K-5. The following are implementation challenges observed over the past ten years. They are included in order to identify common hurdles to change that school districts might anticipate when implementing a RTI model.

Conceptual Shift—re-thinking of commonly held beliefs and practices.

1. Special education is **not** a place but a point on a continuum of interventions—the need for special education is demonstrated empirically by graphed data showing the student's educational needs require more intensive assistance than can be reasonably provided in a general education setting.
2. Special education teachers are first and foremost teachers—not resource or self-contained teachers.
3. Role and function of related service personnel—school psychologists have been key participants during this ten-year shift. This has been by design; school psychologists bring a strong assessment background to the school-based teams. The role of the school psychologist in the District's RTT model is significantly different than in a traditional model. Now, school psychology practice is more observable. They are expected to understand the model and on-going training is provided to all psychological personnel with an all-year staff development program providing updates in best practice. There is more emphasis on direct services in the classroom, leadership in small group settings and well-developed consultative skills.

Figure 2. Comparison of How a School Psychologist's Time Was Spent During a "Typical" Month Under the Rule Replacements Pilot Program Versus the Traditional School Psychology Model

Activity	Time Spent Under Rule Replacements Pilot Program	Time Spent In Traditional Model
Student Study Team Meetings	1,215 minutes	345 minutes
Individualized Education Plan Meetings	185 minutes	210 minutes
Special Education Staffings	1,065 minutes	1,860 minutes
Re-evaluation Review Meetings	120 minutes	285 minutes
Consultation with Teachers	990 minutes	615 minutes
Consultation with Parents	420 minutes	215 minutes
Consultation with Administrators	105 minutes	540 minutes
Consultation with Counselors	None	90 minutes
Direct Observations	675 minutes	75 minutes
Indirect Observations	180 minutes	None
Administering Precision Teaching Probes	1,320 minutes	195 minutes
Traditional Psychological Evaluations	120 minutes	1,950 minutes
Developing and Implementing Behavior Intervention Plans	255 minutes	45 minutes
Developing and Implementing Academic Intervention Plans	75 minutes	None

Buy-in

At a district level, it is very difficult to attempt a major shift in operations without top-down acceptance and support. In Horry County, the superintendent was approached in the earliest stages of planning. In addition, support from the state level makes piloting and pre-operational work easier from a district buy-in perspective. It is a mistake not to communicate with all district stake holders (e.g. speech/language therapists, school psychologists, school administrators etc.) and, of course, teachers. It is a common error to spend an inordinate amount of time "admiring the problem" rather than deciding on what small and purposeful steps can be made.

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Engaging the RTI



Resistance

Change in any form will meet resistance. Resistance to a RTI model comes largely from the various stake holders groups. Originally in our district, there was an expressed fear that school psychologists would lose their career since their primary role (assessment) would be diminished. The exact opposite has proved to be the case. Ten years ago, the district employed 18 school psychologists. Today, we employ over thirty school psychologists. The district also added a new category of personnel connected with RTI—interventionists.

Observations

1. RTI offers more opportunities for parental participation as opposed to simple parental attendance. This is especially noticed when working with minorities.
2. RTI offers services to meet the identified needs of the student in the initial stages of the intervention process. Eligibility issues are addressed only after the need for more intensive services are empirically validated. This is a reversal of the traditional eligibility-needs continuum.
3. A legitimate concern should be the amount of time anticipated for staff development, creation of local norms, intervention materials, and time to develop the infra structure needed to support this level of change.
4. There must be an on-going commitment to ensure fidelity of practice—some form of oversight is very beneficial. A good suggestion is to have a district oversight committee meet on all possible entitlement cases to review data and procedures.

5. Prevention/Intervention—RTI in grades K-2 is particularly effective. Offering assistance via interventions at this level has proven very beneficial.

Data reflects a major shift in the ability under an RTI model to identify children at earlier grades.

Figure 3. Entitlement by Grade

School Year	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
Grade				
K-2	72%	76%	79%	78%
3-5	28%	24%	21%	22%

Conclusion:

The district's experience with RTI has been favorable. However, as with any major systems change, there have been obstacles to overcome and issues both technical and functional to address. Ultimately, the original belief that—"this is in the best interest of all students"—has prevailed and been supported. ■

Top 10 Ways to Mess Up Response to Intervention (RTI) Implementation: Lessons From the Trenches

Top Ten Ways To Mess Up Response to Intervention

Constant change: to many these words seem an oxymoron. Things that are constant cannot be changing. However, this seems to be our reality in schools every year. Each year we think, “It can’t change any more than last year” and then August rolls around, we go back into our classrooms and each year by December we seem to be wrong. With all of the “mandates,” “great ideas,” rules and regulations coming out of our state and federal legislatures, the pace seems to have done nothing but quicken.

Despite all the change, we have tremendous opportunity to make a difference for our kids. The challenge lies in trying to make a difference for all of our kids in concert with (if not despite) all of the new regulations. Having worked on changing schools for close to two decades now, I am convinced that it can happen. Indeed, the term accountability doesn’t have to feel like a four letter word. Instead of looking at accountability as “doing things to try to avoid possible sanctions,” if we look at accountability as the process of “doing the right things, at the right times to get the right results” a whole new world of possibilities opens up for us. Changing our systems can become a vehicle for instructional improvement and expansion rather than a vehicle for narrowing and prescribing.

As a student and implementer of change for over 20 years, there are a number of mistakes I have witnessed people make time and again in the service of innovation. Most of these fall into the category of “things that sound like they make sense” until you do them, then their consequences play themselves out in all of their glory. We have certainly learned about more than 10 mistakes in our years implementing RTI practices, but here, in my best David Letterman fashion is the current top 10 ways to mess up RTI implementation in schools.

10. Be “THE” expert. Too often in systems change, a single person is set up as the keeper of the wisdom related to the change. Sometimes we feel like we don’t know enough without an expert’s help in order to make meaningful



change. Successful examples of innovation, however, as noted by change scholar Michael Fullan most often reflect “organized common sense.” No matter what changes are going on in your school, there are lots of people with good ideas that can be integrated into the change process. It is highly unusual that only one expert’s ideas are going to always be the best ones for your school. So, one way to mess up RTI is to rely too much on one person’s ideas—even if it is the “expert from out of state that we’re paying a bunch of money.” One of the great things about RTI is that there is no one expert on the topic. Indeed, the most successful people who have been implementing RTI concepts for close to 20 years will tell you that they have borrowed ideas from many people around the country.

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9. Demand agreement: “My way or no way.” Sometimes during change, a leader with vision will lay down the law that things must play out in the change exactly as she or he has laid it out. It does not matter how expert and precise the plan may be, top-down-only change rarely creates ownership by those who are implementing it and often creates resistance. Moreover, change in schools is never pristine and does not ever follow too specific of a roadmap, even one specified in advance. There are just too many variables in the equation to plan for everything up front. A more effective pattern for change is to set forth the objectives that are to be accomplished, involve many voices in decision making, collect data along the way and modify plans as the data warrant.

8. Put down past practices and procedures. It is true that there are improved instruction, assessment and decision making practices that are used as a part of RTI systems. In many cases, these practices were developed within the past 10 to 15 years. The process is evolutionary. However, because we have these tools now in our educational toolbox does not in any way mean that what we have done for many years was in any way improper or wrong. We were doing the best we could at the time, given the tools that we had, just as we are now doing. What would be wrong would be to continue implementing less effective historical practices in light of new knowledge and skills that allow us to improve results for our kids. In sum, we need to celebrate our rich past but not let it get in the way of our bright future.

7. Acknowledge and pay attention to the wrong things. No matter how a school goes about it, implementing RTI requires new behavior on the part of nearly everyone. As we go through change, it is important to have clarity on specifically what it is we’re trying to change and we need to support each other in word and deed as we go through the change. We need to reinforce both effort and success. We need to applaud professionalism over proceduralism. And we need to celebrate our efforts that are in the best interest of our children, not just those that keep us out of compliance prison.

6. Talk only about “the what.” As RTI begins being implemented in our schools, a tremendous amount of communication must occur. Everyone from our school boards to our teachers, our administrators, our parents and yes even folks in our state departments of education need to be involved. It is important in all of these conversations to always start them by answering the “why” before getting into the what. There are so many trees in the forest of RTI that it is really easy to get lost telling people about vegetation. Instead, whenever conversation takes place about RTI it is most important to frame it around the concept that this is a new way to structure resources in our schools that can improve educational results for all of our children. The purpose is what most people care most about. Once the people involved understand what we are trying to accomplish, most often they will support us in getting on with the business of implementing RTI practices.

5. Don’t publicize your success. One of the things we are really good at in schools is being modest. We have accomplished huge successes in educating ALL children in the 20th and 21st centuries in America. We have a zero reject model and we do an incredibly good job doing it. Can we get better? Certainly, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t incredibly powerful success stories coming out of our schools. This only increases when schools begin implementing RTI. It is imperative that we work hard to get these stories out into our schools and communities in as many ways possible.

4. Change the focus of your innovation year after year (Using the “inservice” model): If we are truly going to make the significant improvements that are needed to enable all kids to be successful, we have to acknowledge a pretty stark reality. It is far more than a “one year” task. The idea that we can keep shifting our professional development focus each year and then expect coordinated and powerful gains in teaching and learning has never been borne out by data. It does not work, and we must

stop doing it. If your school is like many I work with, recent years have seen everything from brain-based learning, to learning styles, to multiple or emotional intelligences, to you name it we’ve seen it. And we’ve spent lots of money on it. As part of my workshops, I often ask teachers to think about all of the “inservice” they’ve gotten in the past 5 or 10 years. I then ask them, how much of it did you implement in your classroom last week? More often than not, the answer is: not very much. Nothing against the content of our professional development, it’s just that we often don’t have a framework to make it all work together and to provide the supports and resources needed to sustain it over the long haul in our classrooms. The alternative is to put together a comprehensive approach that will span multiple years, and maintain a unified focus. It takes this to make the changes that truly make a difference in student learning.

3. Be closed minded about criticism. No matter what approach you take to implementing RTI in your school, there will be critics. Some will be internal and some will be external. It is axiomatic—change is more work, it causes stress and most of us would rather not do it, if the truth be told. We will only do it if the case is made as to why, if we buy into that reason and if we believe we have the resources and supports to make it come to life. As leaders of change, you must prepare for criticism and be open to it. You’ll notice I did not use the words “resistance to change” here. Resistance can connote that individuals are against the purposes of the change that is being made. Oftentimes, that is not true. Nearly everyone in schools want to improve. Sometimes folks just have different opinions about what that change should look like. Hence, they aren’t resisting so much as they have different perspectives about what changes should be made. Perhaps the best approach to criticism of RTI involves: a) listening carefully and deeply to your critics’—cause they just might be right, and b) inviting them to the table to participate in the decision making regarding new practices to be adopted. If the case has been made that the status quo must improve, then there is ample latitude for ideas about specifically what to do and how to go about it. If this approach is taken to working through criticism, it is not uncommon for some of your staunchest critics to become some of your most vocal supporters.

2. Plan it, but don’t do it. We in education are great planners. Think about all of the different plans we have to have to run a public school! Another sure way for RTI to not make any difference for kids is to plan it but not do it. Actually getting RTI practices up and running in a school is quite a messy process. There are new skills to learn, new structures to put in place and lots of “sacred” things get messed with (e.g., master schedules, who’s teaching what, needing to develop additional instructional options, etc.) The thing about it, however, is once you get off the dime and move forward, you can start seeing improvements nearly immediately, so the process becomes self-sustaining rather quickly.

1. Start too big, without laying the groundwork. Of all the ways to crash and burn, this one is perhaps the most spectacular. Just as the RTI triangle illustrates the process of building all of your school’s instruction on a strong foundation, so an RTI foundation needs to be built before you build an initiative. The foundation typically includes learning, information sharing, and consensus building. It takes commitment to creating a better future and the generation of a “can do” attitude among a majority of staff within a building. If too much training, infrastructure development or implementation takes place before a foundation is laid, a great risk is being taken that could ultimately doom the initiative to failure and end up in a “Big Bang” all your own.

In addition to the many lessons we have learned over the years about what really doesn’t work, there are also lessons we’ve learned about what really **does**. These are structures or factors that you can build into your system that will increase the probability that your RTI initiative will get off on the right foot and become sustainable across time.

Top Ten Ways To Succeed with RTI

10. Start Small and Contextualize. The unit of change in RTI is school building, not district, region or state. It is possible for multiple buildings within a district to implement RTI practices simultaneously. However, some latitude for each building is necessary. No two RTI implementations are exactly alike in all details. Schools differ along the dimension of teachers' training, backgrounds, resources, preferences, philosophies, politics and students. To expect that any two buildings' implementation of RTI would be exactly alike is unreasonable. The principles underlying their implementations will be the same, but the specific strategies used in each situation will vary somewhat. Allowing there to be some variation across settings helps create ownership at the building level by allowing individual buildings to make important decisions about which strategies and approaches best will meet the needs of their students.

9. Invest the resources to know what you're doing. Even the best instructional strategy is doomed to failure if it is implemented incorrectly or in the wrong situations. When implementing RTI practices, it pays to take your time and invest time and energy in making sure that implementers know both what they are doing instructionally and importantly, why they are doing it. That is, how it is contributing to overall better results for students within the schools.

8. Be supportive of failure—let no one fail alone! It is inevitable during change that some things will work right out of the shoot and some things won't. That is one of the great strengths of an RTI approach, when done correctly, it is self correcting. So, if something doesn't work, results will show it and practices can be modified accordingly. An important component of any change process is encouraging people to take risks. Very little is gained if people are not willing to take risks, and a culture of risk taking is important to establish. One really good way to do this is to simply talk about it in meetings. Talk about the different risks that people have taken in implementing new practices. Celebrate both those risks that paid off as well as those that did not. It is an important principle of implementing change to not let anyone fail alone, which means that few risks are taken alone, and when things don't go as planned, a group of people can take responsibility for the "risk gone awry."

7. Promote the changes, don't sell them. It is a basic assumption underlying any change process that the new practices are intended to improve upon historical practice. When this is the case, the new practices are naturally supported within the system and continue of their own accord. It is important, especially during initial infrastructure building and implementation to not oversell the change process. It is usually best to undersell and over deliver. That is, give people time to experience the changes in their own time on their own terms. A context where specific procedures are oversold can backfire by creating pressure on people to be supportive when they are experiencing the new practices for the first time. Slow and steady wins the race.

6. Change how you think. Being successful with long-term change requires that at least some of us change how we think about change. As mentioned before it is important to know the whys as well as the whats about change. It is also critical that a group of leaders develop a relentless energy and focus that helps carry the momentum of change forward. Arguments need to be reframed consistently from "why we can't" to "how can we?" New conversations need to be started with all of your schools constituencies: parents, advocacy groups, community members, your legislature.

5. Keep an eye on your data, use them as a catalyst for change. One of the few universals of RTI is data-based decision making. The use of data across time to determine if things "are working" rather than if "they

worked," is one of the big ideas of RTI. In order to do this, we both need to collect different data and collect them more frequently than we have in the past. The kinds of data used most often for this kind of monitoring are classroom-relevant measures that are sensitive to small increments of change. By using data over time (formatively is the word used to describe "over time" data collection), RTI systems become self correcting. Thus, if the new strategies are working and the data show it, you can keep it up. If, however, the data do not reflect the improvement you are looking for, modifications can be made to the strategies to improve them and the cycle continues.

4. Be in for the long haul, not the short burn. To succeed at RTI, significant commitment to learning new skills and to changing certain structures within your school to better support student learning is required. Getting RTI up and running in your school, full bore, will take 3 to 5 years. It takes time and it takes perseverance. It is also worth it, since the benefits for students can be tremendous.

3. Recognize people for their good work. When RTI gets going, there are LOTS of opportunities for individuals and groups to look good personally and professionally. It is important to recognize that work. It can be as simple as asking folks to share results at a staff meeting, at a Parent-Teacher Organization meeting, a school board meeting or with parents. Writing an article about someone's or some group's accomplishments in a school newsletter or local newspaper are other ways to recognize the contributions made by the many, many people involved with successful RTI implementation. The important thing is recognizing the many contributions that go into improving schools for students.

2. Allow leadership to emerge from all parts of the system. RTI implementation requires leadership. Leadership in this context is not a position, it is a role. In nearly all RTI implementations, leadership is distributed among many persons within a school. Teachers are always implementation leaders—they participate on leadership teams, help make decisions about practices and can become chief architects of their building's RTI system. Principals can be implementation leaders and also are able to use their positional authority to support and advocate for RTI practices. Paraprofessionals can help many RTI practices (e.g., data collection) and nearly everyone in a school can participate. As Joel Barker said in his book, *Future Edge*, "a leader is a person you would follow to a place you wouldn't go yourself."

1. Base your work on questions not answers. One of the most important lessons we have learned about bringing lasting change to schools may sound counterintuitive. So many attempts at school change have come to schools with canned programs, packaged strategies and the answers to all of the questions already prearranged. Few of these approaches have much documented evidence that they truly improve the way we accomplish schooling. An alternative approach for bringing RTI to schools is to build the school's implementation on questions instead of answers. RTI does not tell people in schools what to think, it tells them what to think about. Asking questions provides a school with the opportunity to examine each question from their own perspective, with their own students in mind and importantly allows the school to select the answer to each question that best suits their needs. This implementation strategy has the positive benefits that allows customization of RTI in each school, it creates buy in and ownership by teachers for the changes that will be attempted in the school and importantly, it creates a certain amount of resiliency to "road bumps" that are inevitable along the way. It has been my experience that when people own the changes they are engaging in and are committed to make them work, the probability of true, foundational improvements in schools occurring goes through the roof. ■

What Is Scientifically-Based Research on Progress Monitoring?

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Introduction

Progress monitoring is when teachers assess students' academic performance on a regular basis (weekly or monthly) for two purposes: to determine whether children are profiting appropriately from the typical instructional program and to build more effective programs for the children who benefit inadequately from typical instruction.

Most classroom assessment relies on mastery measurement. With mastery measurement, teachers test for mastery of a single skill and, after mastery is demonstrated, they assess mastery of the next skill in a sequence. So, at different times of the school year, different skills are assessed. Because the nature and difficulty of the tests keep changing with successive mastery, test scores from different times of the school cannot be compared (e.g., scores earned in September cannot be compared to scores earned in November or February or May). This makes it impossible to quantify or describe rates of progress. Furthermore, mastery measurement has unknown reliability and validity, and it fails to provide information about whether students are maintaining the previously mastered skills.

Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) avoids these problems because, instead of measuring mastery of a series of single short-term objectives, each CBM test assesses all the different skills covered in the annual curriculum. CBM samples the many skills in the annual curriculum in such a way that each weekly test is an alternate form (with different test items, but of equivalent difficulty). So, in September, a CBM mathematics test assesses all of the computation, money, graphs/charts, and problem-solving skills to be covered during the entire year. In November or February or May, the CBM test samples the annual curriculum in exactly the same way (but with different items).

Therefore, scores earned at different times during the school year can be compared to determine whether a student's competence is increasing.

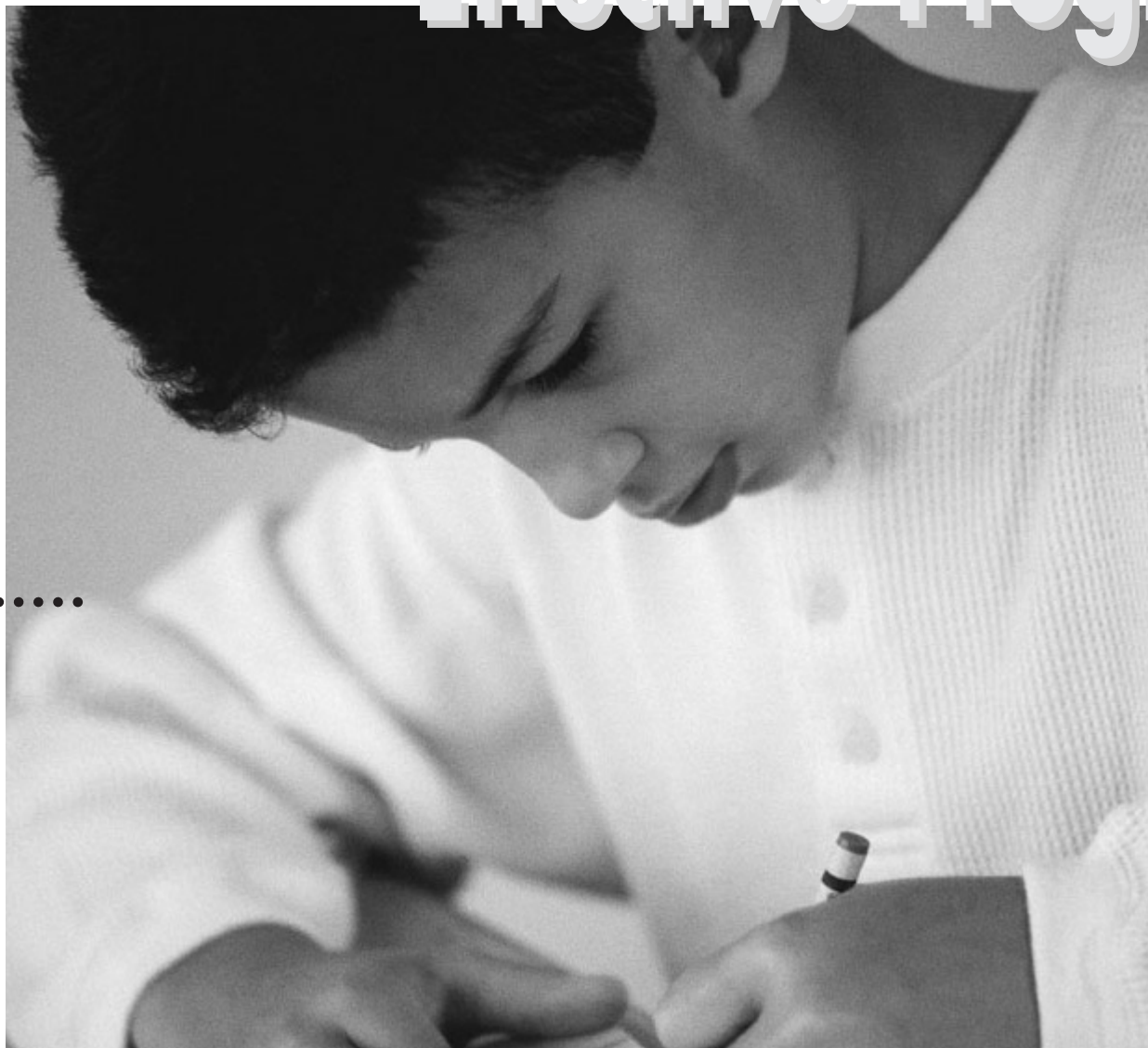
CBM also differs from mastery measurement because it is standardized; that is, the progress monitoring procedures for creating tests, for administering and scoring those tests, and for summarizing and interpreting the resulting database are prescribed. By relying on standardized methods and by sampling the annual curriculum on every test, CBM produces a broad range of scores across individuals of the same age. The rank ordering of students on CBM corresponds with rank orderings on other important criteria of student competence (1) For example, students who score high (or low) on CBM are the same students who score high (or low) on the annual state tests. For these reasons, CBM demonstrates strong reliability and validity (2) At the same time, because each CBM test assesses the many skills embedded in the annual curriculum, CBM yields descriptions of students' strengths and weaknesses on each of the many skills contained in the curriculum. These skills profiles also demonstrate reliability and validity (3) The measurement tasks within CBM are as follows: pre-reading, reading, mathematics, spelling, and written expression.

CBM produces two kinds of information. The **overall CBM score** (i.e., total score on the test) is an overall indicator of competence. The **CBM skills profile** describes strengths and weaknesses on the various skills assessed on each CBM test.

Teachers use the overall CBM score in three ways.

First, overall CBM scores are used in **universal screening** to identify students in need of additional or different forms of instruction. For example, CBM can be administered to all students in a class,

Effective Programs



school, or district at one point in time (e.g., October or January). Then, children in need of additional attention are identified using (a) normative standards (i.e., identifying students who score low compared to other students in the class, school, or nation) or (b) CBM benchmarks (i.e., identifying students whose scores fall below a specific cut-point that predicts future success on state tests).

The second way teachers use overall CBM scores is to **monitor students' development of academic competence**. That is, students are measured weekly or monthly, with each student's CBM scores graphed against time. This graph shows the student's progress toward achieving competence on the annual curriculum. If the graphed scores are going up, then the student is developing competence on the annual curriculum; if the scores are flat, then the student is failing to benefit from the instructional program. The rate of weekly improvement is quantified as slope. Research provides estimates of the amount of CBM progress (or slope) students typically make. So, a teacher can compare the slope of her/his own class to the slope of large numbers of typically developing

students to determine whether his/her instructional program is generally successful or requires adjustment. Teachers can also examine the slopes of individual students to determine which children are failing to make the amount of progress other children in the class (or nation) are demonstrating and therefore require additional help.

The third way teachers use overall CBM scores is to **improve instructional programs**. For students who are failing to profit from the standard instructional program (as demonstrated via universal CBM screening or via inadequate CBM progress-monitoring slopes), teachers use CBM to "experiment" with different instructional components. As teachers adjust instructional programs, in an attempt to enhance academic progress for these children, the teachers continue to collect CBM data. They then compare CBM slopes for different instructional components to identify which components optimize academic growth. In this way, teachers use CBM to build effective programs for otherwise difficult-to-teach children.

Continued on page 22

Teachers use the CBM skills profiles to identify which skills in the annual curriculum require additional instruction and which students are experiencing problems with maintaining skills after initial mastery was demonstrated. This kind of information can be accessed via CBM because every test assesses every skill covered in the annual curriculum. So, mastery status on every skill can be described directly from each CBM test.

Overview of research

This overview is organized in three sections: (a) evidence on CBM's utility to identify students in need of additional or different forms of instruction, (b) evidence on the usefulness of CBM's graphed analysis of the overall score to help teachers improve their instructional programs and effect better student achievement, and (c) evidence on the added value of CBM's skills profiles for designing superior instructional programs that produce greater learning.

Identifying students in need of additional or different forms of instruction

Research shows that CBM can be used to prompt teacher concern about student progress and to signal the need for additional or different forms of instruction. For example, in a recent study, 24 second-grade teachers were randomly assigned to control or CBM progress monitoring groups. Progress monitoring teachers, with the assistance of computers, collected CBM oral reading fluency data with every student in their classes. The computer organized the CBM information into individual student graphs as well as class reports. These reports showed CBM class graphs; noted students who fell in the lowest quartile of the class; and identified students in need of comprehension instruction,

fluency development, or decoding work. In addition, the report provided a rank ordering of the students in the class, sorting them into those who already had met the year-end CBM benchmark, those who were on track to meet the year-end benchmark, and those who were at risk of failing to achieve the year-end benchmark. Teachers collected CBM data for 15 weeks, with individual graphs shown at the end of every data-collection session and with class reports printed every 3 weeks. Every 3 weeks, teachers answered the questions, "Do you have children whose progress seems problematic? Which children are you concerned about?" Progress monitoring teachers expressed concern about statistically significantly more students. Moreover, when asked, "Why are you concerned about _____?" Progress monitoring teachers described features of student performance to explain their concern; by contrast, control teachers cited reasons beyond their control (such as English Language Learner status, special education status, attention or motivation problems, or inadequate parental involvement). This pattern of results was statistically significant. Therefore, systematic progress monitoring can be used to raise teacher concern about students' reading progress and to signal the need for additional or different forms of instruction.

Usefulness of graphed analysis of the overall CBM scores

Evidence strongly supports the utility of graphed analysis of overall CBM scores in helping teachers plan more effective programs. Studies conducted over the past decade provide corroborating evidence of strong effects on students' reading, spelling, and mathematics achievement when teachers rely on CBM progress monitoring to help them plan their instruction. A study conducted in the New York City Public Schools (6) illustrates this research. Teachers participated for 18 weeks in a control group (i.e., no systematic progress monitoring) or a CBM progress monitoring group. In the progress monitoring group, teachers measured students' reading performance with CBM oral reading fluency twice weekly, scored and graphed CBM performances, and applied CBM decision rules (described in the next three paragraphs) to those graphs to plan their students' reading programs. Children whose teachers employed CBM progress monitoring to develop reading programs achieved statistically significantly better than students in the control group on measures tapping a variety of reading skills, including a fluency test as well as the decoding and comprehension subtests of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test. So, teachers used CBM's graphed analysis to effect greater reading achievement in terms of fluency, decoding, and comprehension.

CBM progress monitoring, using the graphed analysis, relies on decision rules that help teachers set ambitious student goals and help them determine when instructional adjustments are needed to prompt better student growth. The student's initial CBM scores are graphed. The teacher uses normative information about expected rates of CBM growth to set a goal for the end of the school year. As the instructional program is implemented, weekly CBM data are collected and graphed. The steepness of the goal line is compared to the steepness of the student's actual rate of improvement. If the steepness of the student's actual rate of improvement is greater, then the CBM decision is to raise the goal. If the steepness of the goal line is greater, then the CBM decision is to adjust the instructional program to stimulate greater learning.



Student Growth



A second way in which CBM can be used to enhance instructional decisions is to assess the adequacy of student progress and determine whether, and if so when, instructional adjustments are necessary. When actual growth rate is less than expected growth rate, the teacher modifies the instructional program to promote stronger learning. Collecting CBM data, in and of itself, exerts only a small effect on student learning. To enhance student outcomes in substantial ways, teachers need to use the CBM data to build effective programs for difficult-to-teach students.

Added value of skills profiles

To obtain rich descriptions of student performance, alternative ways of summarizing and describing student performance are necessary. Because CBM assesses performance on the year's curriculum at each testing, rich descriptions of strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum can be generated, and studies show how these skills profiles enhance teacher planning and student learning. Studies have demonstrated how

structured, well-organized CBM information about students' strengths and difficulties in the curriculum can help teachers build better programs and effect greater learning.

Summary

Teachers can use systematic progress monitoring in reading, mathematics, and spelling to identify students in need of additional or different forms of instruction, to design stronger instructional programs, and to effect better achievement outcomes for their students.

This article is abridged from its original longer version. The complete article can be found at:
www.updc.org/frame.html?content=http%3A/www.updc.org/library/speducator/index.html

References available upon request from the Utah Personnel Development Center ■

Look up “numeracy” in a dictionary and it will define numeracy as “competence in the mathematical skills needed to cope with everyday life and the understanding of information presented in mathematical terms, like charts, graphs, and tables.” What are these skills and how do we measure them? The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) established content standards for school mathematics as the mathematical understanding, knowledge and skills that students should acquire from pre-kindergarten to grade twelve (PSSM, 2000). The NCTM content standards: number sense, algebra, geometry, measurement and data analysis/probability are implemented through our state core curriculum. Though the research on mathematics and RTI is in its early stages, many studies are demonstrating a need for a tiered approach to mathematics instruction. Before RTI can be fleshed out fully across grade levels and the various areas of math, however, a lot of work remains to be done (Fuchs, 2006).

Math & RTI



With the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the appearance of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in our state, teachers are under more pressure to provide evidence of student growth in academics. End of level testing (CRT) does not provide timely data for teachers to make instructional decisions. There has been much research in literacy and we know quite a bit about preventing reading disabilities, especially on word-level skill (Fuchs, Compton & et. al, 2005). The use of progress monitoring in literacy has given practitioners a tool to monitor and adjust instruction as needed. (i.e. DIBELS, ORF, Maze) According to the National Center for Student Progress Monitoring, progress monitoring is a scientifically based practice that is used to assess students' academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class and is an essential component in implementing a tiered approach of instruction.

Since progress monitoring is an essential component of a RTI model, we need to measure progress in mathematical competency. But what about progress monitoring in mathematics and why should we use it? By denying our students access to math, we close an entire world to them. Progress monitoring is based on the student's curricula, can be used to make instructional decisions and can be given repeatedly to measure growth. This type of formative assessment gives a global picture of a student's academic growth and aligns well with other measures that are utilized in the class. We have very specific general outcome measures (GOM) for literacy, but mathematics is both process and conceptual understanding.



RTI

Fuchs, Hamlett and Fuchs state that mathematical proficiency can be divided into two general outcome measures: computation and conceptual understanding. We can measure student growth in mathematics by measuring progress in grade level computation and grade level conceptual understanding. Fluency in computation is essential, but is only one part of mathematical proficiency. Conceptual understanding is just as important. A student may not be fluent in grade level computation, but can clearly demonstrate competence with higher-level mathematical concepts. Monitoring students on both computation and concept development can give us a better understanding of a student's math proficiency.

The use of Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) is one way to measure progress in mathematics. According to Stan Deno, CBM is an approach for assessing the growth of students in basic skills that originated uniquely in special education. A substantial research literature has developed to demonstrate that CBM can be used effectively to gather student performance data to support a wide range of educational decisions. Those decisions include screening to identify, evaluating pre-referral interventions, determining eligibility for and placement in remedial and special education programs, formatively evaluating instruction, and evaluation reintegration and inclusion of students in mainstream programs (Deno, 2003). CBM is one tool for monitoring progress in mathematics. Grade level probes can be created or purchased. (Go to: www.updc.org Math Corner for free downloadable probes for computation)

What does this look like in a tiered service delivery model? Tier 1 is the general education classroom. In Tier 1, teachers use evidence-based instruction in the core curriculum and benchmark all students 3 times a year to monitor student progress in both computation and concept development. Students not meeting benchmark would move to Tier 2. In Tier 2 students require short term goal oriented intervention, in addition to the class instruction

(Fuchs, 2005). Students in Tier 2 are monitored more frequently at their instructional level. Instructional decisions would be made based on the rate of growth. A student not progressing in Tier 2 would be considered for Tier 3, a more intensive individualized intervention and possible referral for special education.

Currently ten elementary schools in Tooele School District are working to implement this approach in first grade classes; Copper Canyon, East, Harris, Middle Canyon, North Lake, Overlake, Rose Springs, Stansbury, West and Willow. During the first week of school, first grade students were assessed using early numeracy probes by the Research Institute on Progress Monitoring (www.interventioncentral.org). Norms for the schools were established and any student below benchmark is considered for Tier 2 which is small group instruction with a tutor. Students meet with the tutor twice a week for 30 minutes. Tutors are using teaching manuals created by Vanderbilt University. The tutors are using first grade computation probes weekly with the students to monitor growth. The intent is to remediate and prevent difficulties in mathematics. Flexible grouping will allow students to move in and out of tutoring about every six weeks if needed. By using CBM, small group tutoring and evidence based instruction, there are plenty of data if a student does not respond to the intervention and may need more intensive instruction.

Initial results of this math intervention project in Tooele have been positive for students and hard work for all involved. To implement this, both general and special educators collaborate and work together to help the students be successful in math. Not only collaboration, but also progress monitoring is essential for making this work. An ongoing, easily accessible data system (i.e. Excel) on student progress is needed to make decisions. Finally, making the essential RTI components work in the context of a school district will ensure that this becomes a systemic manner of instruction for all. ■

What is Fluency?

For reading experiences to be enjoyable and meaningful, students must be able to orchestrate skills in word reading, vocabulary, and comprehension with accuracy and ease. While formal agreement on a definition of fluency alludes us, common features across the definitions include the following: 1) accuracy in word recognition; 2) a focus on comprehension; and 3) facility or ease in which both of these processes work together (Hudson, Mercer, & Lane, 2000; Meyer & Felton, 1999; Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Because of its dependence on accurate word reading, fluency is also contingent on the skills necessary to develop word reading, namely language and vocabulary skills, depth of decoding skills, and a range of prior reading and instructional experiences. Proficient readers are so automatic with each of these component skills, that they are able to focus their attention on constructing meaning while reading (Kuhn & Stahl, 2000).

How Do We Evaluate Effectiveness of Instructional Efforts?

The most common way for evaluating progress is using a measure of oral reading fluency (ORF) where the number of words read correct (WRC) in a minute are calculated (Deno, 1989). When evaluating student performance regularly (e.g., weekly, bi-monthly) with ORF, we must select materials/passages of equal difficulty so that the change in score is a reflection of changing **student skill** level rather than an artifact of the passage. There are a number of different sets of passages that have attempted to create materials with equal difficulty. Regardless of materials selected, there will be variability from passage to passage, regardless of which readability formula/approach utilized in development. For this reason, we evaluate student performance based on **trend/pattern** of performance across time. Because ORF is a one-minute sample, the score on a given assessment is sensitive to the nature of the passage as well as

Considerations in Fluency Interventions and Assessment

The most common approach to improving fluency for the struggling reader is through the use of repeated reading approaches. Repeated reading is the process of having a student re-read a passage a number of times until the student reads with a level of fluency and prosody. A recent analysis completed by Therrien (2004) examined many repeated reading studies completed over the past 15 years and identified four instructional elements related to improved reading fluency and comprehension.

- **Reading to an adult.** While there are many variations to intervention implementation, studies where the student reads out loud to an adult at some point during the intervention was significantly better than reading to a peer or themselves.
- **Clearly stated purpose focused on comprehension.** Studies where the intervention made it clear that the student's efforts were to improve overall reading proficiency were more effective than interventions where this was unclear or if it emphasized rate of reading.
- **Repeatedly reading passages 3-4 times.** Interventions that read passages 3 or 4 times were significantly better than interventions that read less than three times. Additionally, there was no added benefit to reading a passage more than four times.
- **Establishing a reading goal and providing corrective feedback.** Studies where students received corrective feedback and with a clearly marked goal obtained better outcomes than studies where students simply practiced independently.

student motivation (as some have said, "we all have a bad minute from time to time"). The more frequently we monitor (i.e., weekly), the sooner we may feel comfortable in making decisions regarding the effectiveness of instruction.

To assist in making timely instructional decisions, graphing of ORF performance is highly recommended. Some have access to programs that do this automatically (see "Chart Dog" program from Intervention Central) or using Excel, yet plotting on simple graph paper is equally effective. Because of the instability of a single ORF assessment, we examine trend of student performance in relation to the established goal line. The typical approach is to examine student performance using the "3-point Rule." The 3-Point Rule advocates for examining trend of the last 3 data points collected (Howell & Nolet, 2000). If the last 3 points are above the goal line the recommendation is either to: a) continue the intervention; or b) consider increasing the goal. If the last 3 points are below the goal line, the recommendation is to modify the intervention to better meet the student's needs. If the last 3 points are around the goal line (i.e., points may be on, one below/above, etc.), the recommendation is to continue the intervention with continued evaluation of student performance.

Considerations in Goal Setting

How far behind a student is, compared to his peers (i.e., 5th grader reading 30 words/minute vs. 5th grader reading 90 words/minute) may impact what level of material you choose for progress monitoring. It is important to have a dual focus in material selection: a) is the student

making progress (instructional-level material) and b) is the student making **enough** progress (grade-level material).

- Is the student making progress? Materials that are closer to the student's instructional level will be more sensitive to skill improvement than grade-level material. It is recommended that instructional level material be used for more frequent progress monitoring (i.e., weekly, bi-monthly) to provide more timely feedback on skill development.
- Is the student making enough progress? Using grade-level materials to provide periodic (i.e., monthly) feedback is helpful to ensure the student who is receiving more intensive instructional supports is catching up to his peers. This may provide feedback regarding whether the intervention is intensive enough to significantly alter a student's learning trajectory.



Because learning is a function of the student's skill level and the nature of the instructional support, both should be considered when creating a goal for progress monitoring. If the student is significantly behind and the intervention implemented is intensive (e.g., 60 minutes) we would expect more growth than the same student provided a less intensive intervention (e.g., 30 minutes). The general approaches used in creating goals are to use: a) normative standards; or b) pre-determined progress rates. Both approaches will be briefly discussed below.

- **Normative Standards:** Student performance is monitored in relation to a normative (percentile) standard. For example, if the student is currently performing at the 9th percentile compared to district/national norms in the fall, you may select a goal of growing faster than peers by attaining the 20th percentile by Spring. There are a number of normative standards available and many schools or districts have also developed their own local norms. The point is to select a future score (e.g., Spring level of performance) that provides feedback on accelerating learning rates.
- **Pre-Determined Growth Rates:** Another approach to goal setting is using growth rates from research studies. For example, in table 1, typical rates of progress (words per week) and 2, 1.5, and 1 words per

week in grades 1-3, respectively. However, these rates are in contrast to the growth displayed by students who grew the most in those same grades (last column). Again, goals/rates should be developed ambitiously and in consideration of the intensity of the intervention to be given to the student. If we were graphing progress using pre-determined growth rates, we would need to determine the long-term goal to create the goal line. To do this we would need to do two things:

1. Determine the Number of Words to Grow (Growth per Week + Number of Weeks=Words to Grow)
2. Determine the Long-Term Goal (Words to Grow + Current Score=Goal)

For Example: Jimmy's current ORF is 28. We set an ambitious goal of 2.5 words per week to be evaluated in 22 weeks. First, we would determine the number of words to grow: words per week (2.5) X number of weeks (22) = 55 words to grow. Next, we calculate the long-term goal: words to grow (55) + current ORF (28) = 83. So our goal would be to monitor Jimmy's progress toward a score of 83 words per minute in 22 weeks using the 3-point rule discussed previously.

Grade	Average	Minimum	Maximum
1	2.10	.35	4.97
2	1.46	.71	4.00
3	1.08	.43	2.43
4	.84	.47	1.41
5	.49	.04	1.12
6	.32	-.22	.97

Cite. Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Walz, & Germann, (1993).

References available upon request from the Utah Personnel Development Center ■

RTI: What does it mean for me?

Joan Schumann, Special Education Teacher, Salt Lake City School District
Doctoral Student, University of Utah and Leanne S. Hawken, University of Utah



"Change is good...but it's not always easy" says Heather Newell, a K-4 resource teacher in Salt Lake City School District. Having recently been introduced to the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, Ms. Newell expresses a positive attitude for the potential benefits RTI may offer students, "I think it will be a lot more work up front, but in the end, it's going to help more students, especially the ones who would typically fall through the cracks."

As special educators become increasingly more familiar with the RTI model, several questions loom overhead. Who will conduct and keep track of the assessment and intervention at each level? Are general educators going to be involved with this process? How will we decide when students move up and down the tiered levels of support? How should our administrators support this effort?

Thankfully, explicit manuals and handbooks have recently been developed to answer some of these questions (e.g. Jimerson, Burns, VanDerHeyden, 2007). One such document is the RTI Manual available through the National Research Center for Students with Learning Disabilities (NRCLD; Johnson, 2006). Here, the authors provide a plan for designating roles and responsibilities associated with RTI (summarized in Table 1). As you take a look at this proposed organizational structure, you'll notice some themes emerge which may differ from your school's current way of serving students. In an effort to help translate what RTI will mean for practitioners, we have focused on three main areas in which you should expect to experience change: (a) the relationship between special and general educators, (b) the selection of assessment tools, and (c) the decision-making process regarding student support.

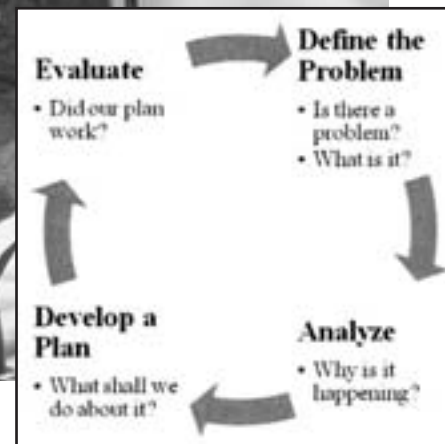


Figure 1

Change in Attitude: No more "My Kid-Your Kid"

As noted in Table 1, roles and responsibilities of specialist/support staff are described in relationship to general education and administrative positions. One of the primary components to the effective implementation of RTI is the level of collaboration happening between general and special education (Batsche, 2005; NJCLD, 2005). Specifically, the old feelings associated with the "my-kid/your-kid" dichotomy must be replaced with feelings of shared responsibility for all students' success.

If we are to move forward in the adoption of RTI we must set aside our prior attitudes and beliefs about the boundaries between general and special education and redefine what it will mean to effectively serve students at risk. Instead of pushing through pre-referral paperwork, educators must ensure high-quality instruction for all students which includes offering effective adaptations and modifications when needed. Moreover, intensive instructional intervention should begin if students show a lack of progress and/or performance by means of effective assessment (Batsche, 2005; NJCLD, 2005). With that, comes the need for increased collaborative efforts between special and general educators, which should reach far beyond filling out paperwork together.

Change in Assessment Purpose: Screening and Progress Monitoring

Prior to RTI, your school may have been utilizing a variety of assessment tools; however, with the adoption of the three-tiered model you should begin to see a change in the assessment tools

currently used to evaluate student performance. As noted in Table 1, several staff/faculty members will participate in using research-validated assessment systems for both screening and progress monitoring purposes. DIBELS is one example of Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) which incorporates benchmark (screening) and progress monitoring measures. This, in addition to their solid research base makes DIBELS and CBM a friendly way to initiate the assessment component of RTI in schools (see www.dibels.org for more information).

Change in Decision Making: Based on Assessment Results

In addition to a change in your selection of measurement tools, you should also evaluate the effectiveness of your decision making process in relationship to your assessment results. In other words, (a) who makes the decisions related to increasing or decreasing student support and, (b) is this process guided by the results of your screening and progress monitoring assessments? If attempting to utilize the RTI framework, the corresponding answers to these questions should be (a) a team comprised of general educators, specialist/support staff, and administrators and, (b) yes, decisions should be based on the student data.

As the responsibilities in Table 1 suggest, the assessment used in RTI are not intended to be administered arbitrarily; on the contrary, this system of support is based on gathering frequent measures of student progress for

the sole purpose of guiding the team's decision-making process (Batsche, 2005; NJCLD, 2005; Marston, Muyskens, Lau & Canter, 2003). In other words, if someone brings student data to the meetings and nobody looks at it, we have a problem. Furthermore, if your team makes decisions about increasing or decreasing the intensity of support without any student data near the vicinity of the team meeting, we have a bigger problem. Finally, this important process of making decisions about when and how to move students through the tiers should look somewhat like the problem-solving model depicted in Figure 1 (Batsche, 2005; Marston et al., 2003). That is, teams should spend time in problem analysis, but more notably, teams need to spend time in developing and evaluating a plan to address the problem.

To conclude, our roles as special educators are changing in response to RTI (pun intended). Some of the primary shifts in our roles are related to a change in attitude, assessment tools, and the way in which we make decisions about supporting students at risk. To summarize, (a) increased collaboration between general and special education should merge to form strong support systems for all students, (b) assessment measures should be efficient and effective tools for screening and monitoring progress and, (c) the process of making decisions should be guided by a problem-solving model based on the results from your assessment measures.

As Ms. Newell alluded to earlier, while change can be difficult it has great potential for alleviating some of the problems inherent in the old

system. Ms. Newell predicts that when special educators are faced with the notion of RTI, some will choose to stay open to change, possibly increasing their positive impact on students; while others may choose not to accept this undeniable shift in our profession. We would agree with this line of thinking and encourage you to consider the possibility that there is a better way to support all students in their academic experience.

References available upon request from the Utah Personnel Development Center ■

Table 1: Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

	General Education*	Specialist/Support Staff*	Administration*
Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Tier 1 with fidelity Administer screening and progress monitoring measures across content areas Use data to inform decision making about instructional support Collaborate with specialists to identify students in need of further monitoring and intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support implementation of screening and progress monitoring to identify students who may be at risk Collaborate with general education to analyze assessment results and determine which students require more intense instructional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead effort to create infrastructure for screening and progress monitoring Provide necessary technology, materials, resources, and professional development Ensure fidelity of implementation through routine, periodic observation and discussions with staff Oversee analysis of progress monitoring results to determine which students are at risk and require more intense instructional support
Tier 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with designated teams to formulate plans for at-risk students Depending on school protocol, provide Tier 2 level support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Tier 2 and beyond instruction to small groups Administer relevant assessments/document progress of students Collaborate with general education teacher to assist in the decision to increase intensity of intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide resources for Tier 2 including appropriate intervention programs, system for progress monitoring, and time for staff collaboration to make decisions about movement of students within tiers Lead the problem-solving model approach to make decisions
Tier 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct progress monitoring of all students, including those receiving special education services Depending on student's IEP, provide appropriate accommodations and modifications for students receiving special education services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide specially designed instruction to individuals or small groups Provide consultation regarding behavioral and instructional problems Collaborate with general education teacher to develop appropriate accommodations/modifications that can be embedded within Tier 1 to provide additional support to targeted students Monitor progress of students receiving special education services and analyze results for consideration of intervention, exit, or changes in intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and oversee school-based instructional support team Provide a supportive environment that encourages collaboration Provide continuing, high-quality professional development to all instructional support and personnel Provide caseloads and schedules that facilitate individualized instruction, documentation of response to intervention, and collaboration among general and special educators, related services, and support personnel

Adapted from the RTI Manual (Johnson, 2006)

* General Education includes general education teacher

* Specialist/Support Staff includes the special education teacher, reading or learning specialist, related services personnel, paraprofessionals

* Administration includes principals and assistants as well as curriculum or assessment specialists at building or district levels

RTI as Part of the Identification Process for Specific Learning Disabilities

*"There are two overarching goals of RTI. The first is to deliver evidence-based interventions and the second is to use students' response to those interventions as a basis for determining instructional needs and intensity. Special education eligibility decisions can be a product of these efforts, but is not the primary goal." (NASDSE, 2007.) Consensus reports from the field and IDEIA recommend abandoning the IQ-discrepancy model and the use of IQ tests for identification of learning disabilities and further recommend the incorporation of RTI. Printed below is a condensed version of an article that is unfortunately too long for this journal. Jack Fletcher, W. Alan Coulter, Daniel Reschly, and Sharon Vaughn synthesize current consensus reports that highlight the necessary shifts in education that prioritize intervention over eligibility, and results and outcomes over the process of eligibility in **Alternative Approaches to the Definition and Identification of Learning Disabilities: Some Questions and Answers**, by Fletcher, J., Coulter, W. Alan, Reschly, D., & Vaughn, S. (2004.) The entire article, including references, can be downloaded at: www.updc.org/frame.html?content=http%3A//www.updc.org/library/speducator/index.html*

Jack Fletcher, W. Alan Coulter, Daniel Reschly, and Sharon Vaughn



Why Is Change Needed?

Recent empirical syntheses and consensus reports share the common finding that IQ is ineffective in the identification of LD and suggest alternatives that do not involve the use of the IQ discrepancy model. IQ-discrepancy or the replacement of IQ by any form of cognitive assessment (excluding achievement tests) has been uniformly criticized,

not only for its lack of an evidentiary basis but also because such approaches are not adequately reliable or equitable. For minority students, cognitive measures such as IQ have been divisive procedures, preventing a focus on many of the more significant problems that educators must address to provide equivalent education for students of all economic, linguistic, and cultural groups. It is widely recognized that the presence of IQ-discrepancy, an achievement difficulty, and absence of the exclusions does not mean that the student has a neurobiological.

There are many other reasons why use of IQ-discrepancy should be abandoned. The IQ-discrepancy criterion is potentially harmful to students as it results in delaying intervention until the student's achievement is sufficiently low so that the discrepancy is achieved. For most students, identification of LD occurs at an age where the academic problems are refractory to even the most intense remedial efforts. Perhaps of even greater concern than the challenge of teaching students critical academic skills later is the price students pay for not learning them early. Simply put, students who learn to read early are higher achievers because they have access to learning both more content knowledge as well as word meanings, critical means for improving knowledge, language, and comprehension. Not surprisingly, the "wait to fail" model that exemplifies identification practices for students with LD does not result in significant closing of the achievement gap for most students placed in special education. Many students placed in special education as LD show minimal gains in achievement and few actually leave special education.

The use of IQ-discrepancy drives assessment practices for most special education services. Nationwide, virtually every student considered for special education eligibility receives IQ and achievement tests. This



practice consumes significant resources, with the average cost of an eligibility evaluation running several thousand dollars. Yet such assessments have little instructional relevance and often result in long delays in determining eligibility and, therefore, services.

In many schools, special education is the only alternative to instruction in general education classrooms. It is not surprising that when school personnel “believe” that students require special education, they often make note of state and federal guidelines for determining eligibility, and conduct testing until the student’s performance yields the necessary discrepancy. Even in schools where these guidelines are ignored or not used, IQ and achievement tests are nonetheless given, even though this approach to assessment is costly and consumes resources that are disproportionate to their instructional implications.

What Are The Alternatives?

Proposed alternatives share three essential components: the need to specify low achievement, identify exclusionary factors, and measure RTI. These alternatives are often presented in the context of approaches underscored in the NCLB legislation: (a) an emphasis on universal screening of all students for reading difficulties in the early school years (kindergarten, Grade 1, or earlier), (b) placement in early intervention programs, and (c) careful monitoring of progress with accountability for results. Students can be identified with LD if they maintain deficient achievement, do not adequately respond to increasingly intense instructions, and do not demonstrate evidence for one of the exclusionary criteria as the primary cause of the lack of adequate response.

What Are The Advantages Of Incorporating Response To Instruction?

There are several advantages to using RTI as one factor in the identification of students as LD. *Most significant is that the focus shifts from eligibility to concerns about providing effective instruction.* Of further importance is the shift from waiting for students to meet IQ-discrepancy criteria (wait to fail) to identifying students who need intervention as early as possible and providing it immediately.

Eligibility determination is, therefore, supported by systematic efforts at enhanced instruction and progress monitoring, not from a protracted evaluation process that takes place in isolation from the classroom and has historically proven to have no benefit for those deemed eligible. Another advantage to an approach that incorporates RTI is that identification is not dependent on teacher referral. Teacher referral has been demonstrated to be biased, yielding disproportionate numbers of boys and African-Americans, likely reflecting behavior management difficulties that make many referred students difficult to manage in the classroom. Various studies report that 70% to 80% of all students referred for special education eventually were identified and placed in special education, raising questions as to why the elaborate referral and assessment process was even necessary.

Continued on page 32





Finding the “right” students is not the most pressing educational challenge for special education. It is shameful to provide regulations that seem to force our schools to continue to engage in practices for which there is little evidence of either prevention or effective intervention. Our most pressing challenge is conveying urgency about preventing disabilities through early screening and effective instruction, and for those who do not respond sufficiently, providing effective special education interventions that change achievement and social/behavioral outcomes. A focus on RTI aids in formally addressing the requirement that “a child shall not be determined to be a child with a disability if the determinant factor for such determination is lack of instruction in reading or math” (P. L. 105-17, sec 614 [b] [5]). Without some RTI activities in place, this component of IDEA is merely surmised and not measured. Lack of RTI criteria place schools in violation of the federal statute, and at substantial risk for denying students their right to a free and appropriate public education.

Including RTI as one of the criteria for identification allows educators and parents to immediately provide students with well-targeted and much needed intervention rather than waiting for extensive, time-

consuming assessments that offer little or no information to inform instruction. The alternative to this form of assessment uses formal progress monitoring, which involves the use of short reading or math probes on a frequent basis in relation to intervention. Such an approach incorporates RTI and ensures that any referral to special education includes data indicating how the student has responded to various interventions. Families do not have to wait for the deliberations of the interdisciplinary team to be completed before initiating efforts to provide assistance to their child since they receive intervention throughout the process. Using RTI criteria requires general and special education to operate as a seamless, unified system, not the dual system that is currently in operation in most school districts. Such models would also require that alternative interventions be established so that special education would not be the only pathway to assistance, a situation characteristic of many schools and districts.

The adoption of progress monitoring and RTI shifts the focus from a set of test scores that have limited utility for improving interventions to approaches that design and guide instruction to accelerate progress. Thus, screening for learning problems occurs before intervention and

Identification Process

formal assessment for eligibility purposes is a *consequence* of instruction, not a prerequisite. A student with LD is identified as one who has *unexpected* difficulty learning and the *discrepancy* is measured relative to the expectation that most students can learn if quality instruction is provided. The definition and identification of students as LD become inherently linked to instruction and the narrowing of the achievement gap. Improved instruction and reducing the achievement gaps should be primary goals in general and special education. If a student needs special education because of a lack of RTI, the interventions provided in special education should be more intense and specialized than what was provided in general education or as part of the pre-referral process, requiring the flexibility and individualization built into IDEA.

Currently, the eligibility process sets a standard that is replicated in the annual and triennial reviews. Both are oriented to maintenance of eligibility, not formal assessments of progress. These reviews yield data that at best serves only to document failure to make substantial academic progress because eligibility is maintained and does not provide guidelines to parents and educators about what to do. Including RTI as part of the eligibility process sets a standard for assessment that is meaningfully related to student outcomes at the very beginning. Criteria that include RTI set the narrowing of the achievement gap as an explicit goal of both general and special education, thus irrevocably linking IDEA and NCLB. Perhaps most important, ongoing progress monitoring data tell teachers and parents when and how students are succeeding on critical benchmarks so that they can determine what they might do to change the rates of progress.

Conclusions: Line Up Ideas With NCLB

As the education community considers potential changes in LD identification, we observe that most of the provisions recommended as alternatives to IQ-discrepancy models are already allowed in IDEA. However, without well-articulated policy and regulations, many schools and parents will be without direction. The most significant challenge in revamping identification procedures and enhancing results for students with LD involves the concept of “aptitude” and how it has traditionally been utilized in models of LD. Even if we reject the use of IQ as an indicator of aptitude, the notion that a student with LD has a discrepancy relative to aptitude as measured by tests deviates from historic conceptions of LD as an inability to learn despite the presence of adequate opportunity. *A major advantage of shifting the focus in LD identification from IQ status to inclusion of RTI is that it more appropriately and immediately addresses the instructional needs of students who are difficult to teach, as opposed to the current model of waiting until they have failed in school.* This allows for learning to be measured through progress monitoring as part of a systematic effort at intervention. Such

approaches facilitate the integration of general and special education around instruction, line up IDEA with the laudatory goals of NCLB, and lead to federal regulations and conceptual models of LD consistent with our best research about teaching and learning. General and special education students alike deserve instruction and support that is appropriate to their learning needs. Service delivery to students in special education needs to be more focused on results and less on process. Obstacles that prevent these changes need to be removed. Otherwise, it is likely that the construct of LD as currently implemented will wither and expire due to the absence of evidence linking identification to improved outcomes.

These arguments in favor of alternative models are not simply about RTI. The alternative models recognize that most forms of LD emerge early in school and can be identified through universal screening. Students who are at risk should receive accelerated instruction through standard, scientifically based protocols, with their progress constantly monitored. Those who do not respond should be candidates for special education. Additional criteria for identification (e.g., exclusions, educational needs) should be considered by an interdisciplinary team. The students who emerge from this process and qualify for special education will, if the interventions are appropriate and provided with integrity, be different from those who are currently served because instructional casualties will be eliminated. The key, of course, is better instruction provided earlier in schooling and enhanced coordination between general and special education. The debate about alternative models is not simply IQ-discrepancy or low achievement versus RTI. It is about whether special education continues to use the now indefensible psychometric models adopted in 1977 or moves to alternative models that prioritize instruction and not eligibility, and student learning as opposed to process. In making these shifts, IDEA becomes aligned with NCLB, ensuring that general education and special education operate as a unified system with common goals.

The NCLB act represents an unprecedented opportunity for the special education community. It requires students with disabilities to be part of the accountability system, which means that they must be afforded effective instruction if schools are to meet NCLB goals. Adopting alternative models of the sort proposed in recent consensus documents will permit special education students to fully benefit from the mandates built into NCLB. Improved achievement and behavioral adjustment should be the goals and outcomes of any educational practice. We have an obligation to think of students who are struggling to learn as difficult to teach before we label them as unable to learn. ■

Student Assessment: Looking Beyond the Scores

Heidi Mathie, Grant Coordinator, UBI Links Grant

With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) professionals are taking a look at the way they assess learning problems and the determination of specific learning disabilities in students. Assessment is a part of the problem solving process to help determine eligibility and program planning. However, what valuable information are we gleaning from the way we choose to assess and interpret? What is the best use of our time and resources? If we have a 3rd grade student who has been tested for special education and the results of the evaluation show low average academic scores and low average cognitive scores, what practical information does this give the team? How is the team going to help this student tomorrow?

In the fields of education and psychology commercially available standardized tests are frequently used. These tests provide professionals with a variety of scores from individual subtest scores to more global index scores. According to Kim, Frisby and Davison (2004) profile analysis is a “generic term used to describe the practice of distinguishing between groups of test takers based on their unique configuration, or pattern of subtest scores (p. 595).

Sattler (2001) describes profile analysis as a procedure for analyzing an examinee’s pattern of scaled scores and IQs. Historically, psychologists such as Lightner Witmer (1867-1956) and other early proponents of cognitive assessment attempted to identify deficits in functioning by focusing on individual differences (Bray, Kehle, Hintz, 1998). There is a history of debate over the utility of using profile analysis, yet this method is still used in both the education and psychology fields.

One factor supporting the evidence against use of profile analysis is the body of literature suggesting that this method has statistical limitations (Wilhoit & McCallum, 2002; Glutting, McDermott, Watkins, Kush & Konold, 1997; Kim, Frisby & Davison, 2004; McDermott, Fantusso & Glutting, 1990; Bray, Kehle & Hintze, 1998). Simply stated the validity and reliability of the scales are diminished when you look at individual subtest scores rather than the more global scores (Wilhoit & McCallum, 2002).

Another factor supporting the evidence against the use of profile analysis relates to best practice in assessment. Reschly &

“What is the best use of our time and resources? How is the team going to help this student tomorrow?”

Grimes (2002) state that one of the most frequent and inappropriate uses of intellectual assessment is to conduct a profile analysis for the purpose of differential diagnosis. An example is determining whether or not a student is learning disabled or emotionally disturbed based on subtest scores. Variation among subtests is normal and should be interpreted as such, not a unique feature of a diagnostic criteria. Kauffman (1994) suggests giving tests of creativity, adaptive behavior, and personality to enhance the assessment in the broader context and increasing the ability to detect strengths and weaknesses in the child's ability spectrum. Best practice in assessment suggests that the professional look at a variety of sources before making any type of decision. Professionals should be wary of focusing on one feature and ignoring, biasing or misinterpreting the rest of the data (Greene, 1991). Other external or environmental factors could influence the assessment, such as the child's relationship with the examiner, the examiner's experience and qualifications with the assessment measure, the testing environment, the child's physiological needs (i.e., food and sleep) or something as basic as the student missing a desirable classroom activity. In short, assessment should be viewed as a process, incorporating multiple measures during multiple occasions, not a single activity.

The third factor supporting the evidence against the use of profile analysis is the utility of the results. Elliott, Witt, Kratchowill & Stoiber (2002) report that one factor resulting in the challenge of selecting, implementing and evaluating interventions for children with learning and behavior problems is the lack of assessment results being linked to interventions. According to Kauffman (1994) interpreting scores in isolation does not provide information of any practical value. This interpretation does not translate to meaningful recommendations.

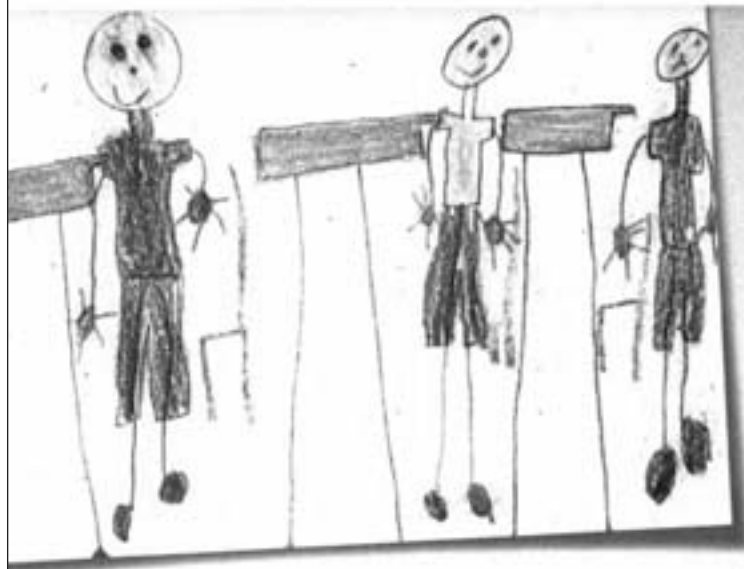
One method emerging as an effective practice is Response to Intervention or RTI. RTI is an objective examination of the cause-effect relationship between academic or behavioral interventions and the student's response to the intervention (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). RTI matches student need with appropriate interventions. Using these methods of assessment produces more systematic (regular) data to make decisions regarding a student's progress and will foster more meaningful and practical recommendations. Traditional classification and intervention approaches do not effectively address all children's needs because the limited resources available are driven by assessment for identification purposes rather than assessment for intervention purposes (Hale, 2006). Recent literature suggests that there is a place for both RTI

and comprehensive evaluations in best practice (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri & Kavale, 2006).

There is no question that professionals in education have a large responsibility when the desired outcome is to increase social competence and academic achievement. With that responsibility comes time restraints and the added pressure of high stakes testing. Assessment and interpretation are critical activities to support this desired outcome. Taking all of these factors into consideration, professionals in education may want to evaluate their assessment and interpretation methods. We can better support students with academic and behavioral needs by focusing on results that will produce more meaningful and practical recommendations. ■



when a child struggles in school



everything parents + educators
should know about getting children
the help they need

Tom Jenkins, Ed.D.



This book is a "heart book" for all educators that work with students experiencing difficulties in school.
Barry Lane (Fairfield, Connecticut, CT), teacher of students with disabilities

After reading Dr. Jenkins' book, it appears that there is a simple and clear way to ensure
each child and give the teachers the tools to actually help all children.
Sara Lewis, Richmond, VA, parent of a child with a disability

How parents + educators can help children successfully progress through school!

The "winds of change" are blowing and an alternative model for providing educational assistance to students in need is being recognized. This model, commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI), could be good news for you and your child. The focus of this book is how RTI helps parents and educators meet the educational needs of children. The major areas of contention surrounding IQ testing, achievement testing, and the discrepancy model are shared in an easily understandable format, while data and case studies are provided to show that RTI is a better way to meet the needs of children.



Dr. Tom Jenkins is a parent and a registered educational psychologist and author. He earned his Educational Specialist Degree from Johns Hopkins University and his Doctorate in Education from the University of Virginia. He is an expert in Response to Intervention (RTI) training and leads a highly successful educational consulting firm in Washington, DC (Special Educational Consultants, Inc.). He has worked as a school psychologist within the public education system for over fifteen years. Dr. Jenkins is a published author and regular after speaker at the annual RTI Conference, Roundtable, Assessment, Problem Solving Model, Student Achievement Study Team Practice, and Research Based Intervention.

Schurringer

Tom Jenkins, Ed.D.

Whenever my educational consultation business takes me near Charlotte, NC, I like to stay with a good friend. One evening, during one of my trips to that area, I was up late catching up with him and his wife when they asked me the reason for all of my recent traveling. I explained to them the sudden interest in Response to Intervention due to its inclusion in federal law and regulations and that due to my experiences with RTI implementation and research, my consulting and training services were now in very high demand. My friend then asked me for an explanation of RTI. After a somewhat brief explanation of the problem solving model, formative evaluation, and eliminating wait to fail, my friend and his wife seemed to have a reasonable grasp of RTI. Their response to my explanation was that it “just makes sense,” and they did not understand why it had not always been done that way. That is one of the critical elements of RTI. It just makes sense.

This conversation got me thinking about one of the difficulties we educators have experienced historically when working with students that are experiencing difficulties in school. Too often, when working with these students, it is extremely difficult to get parents to collaborate with our efforts to help the child. Sometimes educators struggle just to get parents to attend meetings in which the child, his or her difficulties, and what is being done in an attempt to help the child are being discussed. In my experience what often is at the root of these parents’ seemingly non-interest is just a basic lack of understanding. It is not that they do not care about their child or how he or she is doing in school. Rather, it is when they do attend those types of meetings they often do not understand what is being told to them or how the process being used to try to help their child works. The feelings of vulnerability that result from this lack of understanding simply cause the parent to avoid the situation at all cost. This is especially true for parents from culturally or ethnically diverse backgrounds, who often walk into meetings in which their child is being discussed and they are the only persons of color sitting at the table. All of this is compounded under the traditional standardized testing model. Far too often the parents’ first contact with the school is when the school asks for permission to evaluate their child. Usually the parents have a limited understanding of what is going to be done for their child, they were simply told that something might be wrong and this is how the school is going to determine if, indeed, there is something wrong. Again because they care about their child and want him/her to do well in school, they sign the permission to evaluate. But then things get worse when the results of this evaluation come back. Another meeting is held in which educational terms like percentile ranks, grade equivalency scores, standard scores, discrepancies, regression formulas, and age equivalency scores are thrown about the room and everyone seems to understand what is going on except for the parents. I had a principal in my school district confide in me that even she was intimidated when her own son went through the traditional evaluation process, so imagine how non-educators

feel. Parents that I have worked with have stated to me, that under the traditional standardized testing model, they felt like something was being done *to* their child rather than *for* their child.

Conversely, parents that have been involved in a RTI process have stated to me that they never realized that there were so many people at their child’s school who were willing to help their child. Response to Intervention offers the perfect opportunity to empower parents. Because of the simplicity of curriculum-based measurement and the common sense nature of the problem solving model, it is easy for parents to understand and play an active role in the efforts to help their children. Whether a school district chooses to implement a three tier model or a four tier model, parent involvement begins from the start. They are partners in the collaborative consultative process. Two of the basic tenants of RTI are that:

1. Parents possess a wealth of knowledge about their children and should be partners in the educational system and
2. Solutions and strategies are best identified when educators, parents, and others involved work collaboratively.

However, in order for this to happen effectively, parents have to be educated on the basics of RTI. This need for parent empowerment was the rationale for my recently published book *When A Child Struggles in School*. If you empower parents with the knowledge and an understanding of how the system works, then they are more likely to attend the meetings and take part in the efforts to try to help their child. This partnership is what is best for the child. The book provides an explanation of the traditional standardized testing model and its flaws. Then a detailed explanation of RTI is provided, along with the advantages that RTI offers that have been evidenced through research and implementation experience. The book then goes on to provide real case studies for further insight into how the RTI process plays out. Parents who have read the book have commented that it was an excellent, concise, and easy to understand explanation of how children can get the help they need and the role that parents can play in that process. They found the terminology very user friendly and the glossary of terms provided in the back of the book very helpful. Additionally, parent satisfaction surveys from one school district with which I have worked indicated a higher level of approval for the RTI process than the traditional model. The two most identified reasons were that they understood the process and they saw their children making the progress that they wanted them to make. Results like this make *When A Child Struggles in School* a must have for every educator and every parent that has a child that is experiencing difficulties in school.

For ordering information contact Tom Jenkins at:
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Bundle of Barriers

(with my sincerest apologies to AESOP)

An old man on the point of death summoned his sons around him to give them some parting advice. He ordered his servants to bring in a bundle of sticks and said to his eldest son: "Break it." The son strained and strained, but with all of his efforts he was unable to break the bundle. The other sons also tried, but none of them was successful. "Untie the bundle," said the father, "and each of you take a stick." When they had done so, he called out to them: "Now, break," and each stick was easily broken. "You see my meaning," said their father. "Union gives strength."

Janet Gibbs, Specialist, Special Education; Ann White, Specialist, Title I; and Lynne Greenwood, Coordinator, Elementary Language Arts, Utah State Office of Education

As educators we have our own bundle of sticks. The bundle is made up of the following “sticks” of misinformation, attitudes and assumptions. *“He is one of yours.” “I don’t have time in the regular classroom, so have special education work with him/her.” “I don’t have special training like you.” “If only general educators would teach these kids.” “Special education is the only place for a student to receive help.” “These are my students and those are yours.” “Resource students don’t need to learn as much.” “Resource students need a different curriculum.” “Resource students can’t learn as much as the other kids.”* Each of you can add your own stick to the bundle of barriers.

Our question is how do we as educators, in general and special education, break the bundle of barriers down? How can we as individual educators cooperate in this task? What is the individual stick in your bundle? In what areas have we cooperated and collaborated with our professional peers? What continuing areas of opportunities are there to cooperate and collaborate with our professional peers? Finally, where do we start?

One ongoing starting point and hopefully a role model is the cooperation and collaboration between special and general education departments at the Utah State Office of Education. The Title I, Curriculum, Assessment, CTE and Special Education departments at the Utah State Office of Education are collaborating on a continuing basis. The following are some of the current collaboration efforts at USOE.

- *Utah’s 3 Tier Model of Reading Instruction*
- *Title I school improvement program*
- *Utah’s Behavior Initiative (UBI schools)*
- *Literacy grant monies*
- *Participating in review of core materials for all students*
- *Participating in review of intervention instructional materials*
- *Attending and participating in curriculum directors state meetings*
- *Attending and participating in State Literacy meetings*
- *Curriculum staff attending out of state conferences with special educators*

Most importantly, the specialists at the Utah State Office of Education have been building positive relationships through

talking, sharing of information on a continuous basis and professionally respecting each others skills and knowledge.

What are some ways to move cooperation to the district, school and classroom level? Here are some suggestions to start the process:

- Invite and participate in each others’ staff development
- Sit by each other in faculty meetings, conferences, and trainings
- Listen to each other without judgment
- Joint grade and school data meetings
- Collaborate on individual student intervention plans
- Collaborate on instructional practices
- Share with each other your area of expertise
- Special educators, take advantage of the professional development opportunities that are open to you. For example:

- CORE Academy
- STAR tutoring trainings
- Literacy conferences/workshops offered by the State Curriculum Department (as a member of a team or individual)

- General educators, take the opportunities to participate in professional development provided by special education. For example:

- SOPRIS WEST Conference (June, 2008)
- DIBELS trainings
- LANGUAGE! trainings
- Wilson trainings

All educators should check the Utah Personnel Development Center website for training opportunities (www.updc.org). In addition, Curriculum, Literacy Coaches and Special Education directors are provided with upcoming training information.

The opportunities and the momentum have never been greater than now. On the national and state levels the expectation is that we work together in a seamless system to help all children. These are huge expectations (some would see them as barriers) of having all students accessing the general curriculum, assessing students needs, targeting instruction to the needs of the student, providing targeted interventions at the point of instruction and providing intense and more targeted instructional interventions. But like the sons in AESOP’s fable we can and need to work together to break each stick in the bundle of barriers in order to impact our future and the future of all children. Our unity in breaking the sticks will be our strength. ■

All teachers want their students to learn to read, but how do teachers decide which programs or teaching strategies should be implemented to ensure the success of all students, particularly at-risk students? Recognizing that teachers desire their students to be successful and that most students can learn to read, the Utah State Office of Education established *Utah's 3 Tier Model of Reading Instruction*. This model provides Utah educators with a process for delivering quality, research-based instruction.

teaching strategies and programs for at-risk students receiving Tier 2 interventions as adequate and appropriate because they are based on reading research about effective strategies, and because they include the five critical components; phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. A common example of this is guided reading.

As knowledgeable skilled educators, we must be cautious when choosing programs and learning strategies for at-risk students receiving Tier 2 support. We must not be misled and assume that the materials are aligned with scientifically based reading research criteria merely because the five critical components of reading are in

What's Best for the Students?



Utah's 3 Tier Model of Reading Instruction:

Tier 2 refers to targeted Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) supplemental instruction. This instruction is aimed at remediating the specific deficits of students who fail to meet Tier 1 benchmarks in one or more of the five critical areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Tier 2 instruction is systematic, explicit, and aligned with Tier 1 instruction. Instructional interventions are differentiated, scaffolded, and targeted based on the needs of individual students as determined by assessment data. (p.14)

This definition speaks for itself with the key words being Scientifically Based Reading Research, systematic, explicit, and aligned with Tier 1. Some educators, however justify their use of

place. We must be wise consumers and responsibly examine and analyze the research behind the interventions available to determine if they have been through a peer review. We must look for a *systematic* sequence of instructional support for at-risk students. An effective reading program builds and teaches in a systematic instructional sequence; it does not introduce a learning strategy as an intervention for a few weeks and assume student mastery. We also need to evaluate the explicitness of the instruction. Effective programs that are presented explicitly provide students with scaffolded learning, including modeling an "I do, we do, you do" teaching strategy. Finally, effective programs that are aligned with Tier 1 or core objectives will provide quality instruction, student practice and review, as well as embedded assessments that measure student mastery throughout the learning process.

Another challenge educators encounter arises during professional development trainings. Some presenters make claims that as long as teaching strategies are based on research they are appropriate for at-risk learners to receive during Tier 2 reading intervention. As skilled, knowledgeable educators, we must remember that teaching strategies based on research do not carry a guarantee of an appropriate instructional goal nor an effective instructional scope and sequence. At-risk students receiving Tier 2 intervention need intensive quality instruction aligned with their needs, using programs that have been proven to obtain effective results with assessments or progress monitoring to ensure that the intervention is working and students are on target.

It is up to each of us as skilled and knowledgeable educators to be wise consumers on behalf of the students for whose education we are responsible. We must not accept helpful strategies or programs just because someone claims they are SBRR aligned. We must only select programs that have been peer reviewed and validated. After all, we care about our students and want to make choices that guarantee success, so making decisions in a professional manner will be in the best interests of our students.

Reference: Utah's 3 Tier Model of Reading Instruction, Utah State Office of Education, Salt Lake City, Utah (January 2007)

Available online at :
<http://www.SCHOOLS.utah.gov/sars/services/pdfs/3-tierread.pdf>

Utah State Office of Education
Language Arts End-of-Level Assessment*

Cache District

percent of students scoring at proficiency (levels 3 & 4)

	<u>First</u>	<u>Second</u>	<u>Third</u>	<u>Fourth</u>	<u>Fifth</u>
2004	91	90	91	86	87
2005	90	93	91	90	88
2006	94	93	92	91	90
2007	92	92	92	91	90

State of Utah

percent of students scoring at proficiency (levels 3 & 4)

2004	77	78	76	77	76
2005	76	79	77	79	78
2006	77	79	78	80	79
2007	n/a	79	75	77	76

* This assessment is given each spring to students in all 40 Utah School Districts in accordance with the accountability requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Direct instruction has been implemented across the district with at-risk students for the past four years during Tier 2 instruction. As you can see, the district CRT scores are the result of careful planning and researching effective programs that have been research based, peer reviewed and validated in a professional journal that guarantees success.

What's Best for the Students?

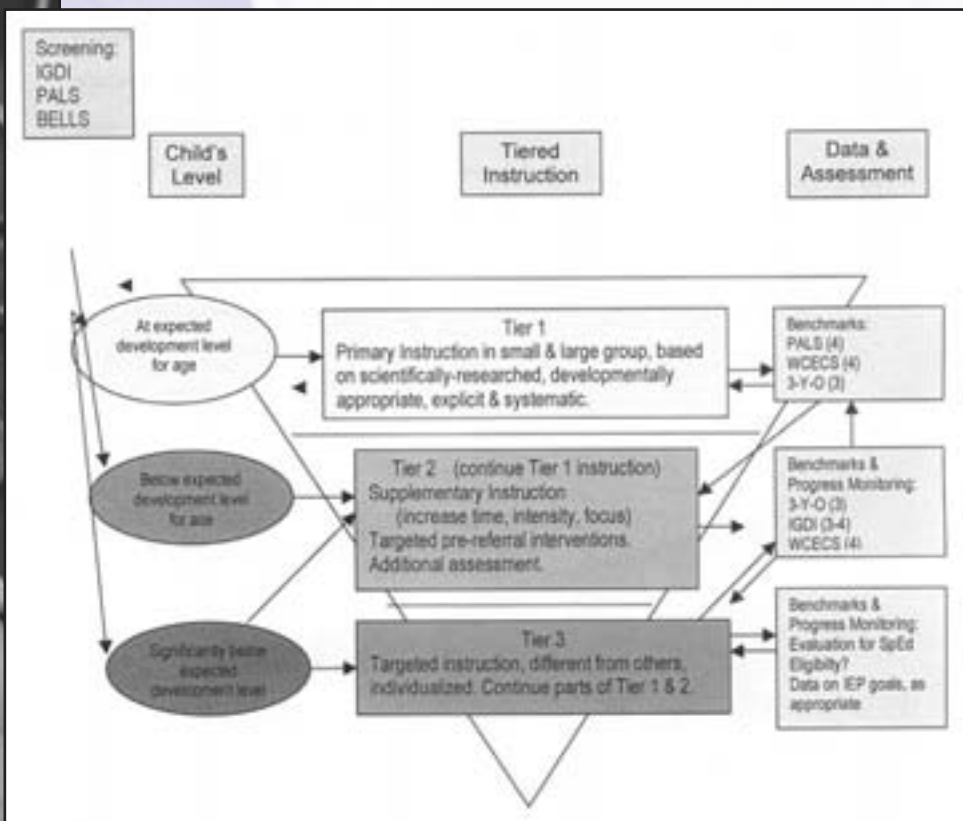
RTI and Preschool: Deal or No Deal?



Should an RTI model apply to preschool settings? Along with secondary settings, preschool seems to be the last frontier to be engaged and studied with the RTI approach. However, the discussion of RTI in preschool has become more common and richer in the past two years.

Certainly we can all agree that the term RTI has been used and abused in its relatively short lifetime. It seems important to recognize that it has various meanings that depend on the purpose, the user, and the child. Under the IDEA, RTI is an eligibility determination method permitted in the category of Specific Learning Disabilities. In the research, RTI is also reported as a method of teaching that has some face validity as a logical approach to ensuring that all children learn what is taught. So the “I” in RTI may represent intervention (eligibility) or instruction (all students).

In applying RTI of either variety to pre-K settings, there is a basic assumption that intentional teaching and instruction is happening in Preschool. While some pre-K educators may hold differences of opinion on the appropriate degree of explicitness in instruction and the balance of teacher directed and child initiated activities during the preschool day, all seem to agree that there should be an intent to produce learning results for all children in the classroom. Examples of appropriate pre-K skills include teaching letter names and sounds through developmentally appropriate activities such as singing, playing games, and physical movement (*Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, 1998, C. Snow, M. S. Burns, & P. Griffin) and oral language development, developing word knowledge, listening, and speaking skills through a variety of fun and engaging activities (*Put Reading First: Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*, 2001, B. Armbruster, F. Lehr, J. Osborne).



A summary of two models of RTI as applied to preschool settings include Recognition and Response (R&R), and Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII). Researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Center for Early Childhood at the University of North Carolina have developed R&R as a method of early identification of students who may have learning disabilities. R&R is a process that involves recognizing children suspected of having disabilities early and responding to their individual needs. The tools used include a checklist called Recognition and Response Observation and Rating Scale (RRORS) that is completed by teachers and parents and examines those learning characteristics of three and four year olds that may predict later development of specific learning disabilities. The project is also developing a manual of interventions for the children in need of additional instruction in the areas of oral language, pre-literacy, and early numeracy.

Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII) is a tiered model of instruction and intervention being developed by the Granite School District's Early Reading First project. The model includes developmentally appropriate, effective, explicit, and systematic instruction in Tier 1 for all young learners in the areas of oral language, alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, print awareness, and book knowledge. Analysis of data from universal screening and benchmarks allows teachers to identify those children in need of additional instruction to meet performance targets. Assessments measure expressive and receptive oral language, phonological awareness skills, numeracy, motor, and social skills with a combination of formal tools, including the PPVT and the

PALS Pre-K, and informal Curriculum Based Assessments (CBAs), such as the *Let's Get Started!* Three Year Old Assessment and the *We Can!* Four Year Old Assessment. Tier 2, in a similar way to school age RTI models and Utah's 3-Tier Instructional Reading Model for all students, provides supplementary instruction in addition to the Tier 1 learning activities for all children. Tier 2 gives additional instructional time, focus, and intensity for those who are struggling as identified by the assessment data. For example, for a child who is not making progress in oral vocabulary development, an adult-teacher, assistant teacher, classroom aide, special education consultant, speech/language pathologist, or trained parent volunteer—may slide into a child-selected block or dramatic play center and engage in conversation focused on relevant vocabulary and sentence forms using the activity as a vehicle.

Children participate in interventions in skill areas over a period of time, often months, while progress monitoring takes place bi-weekly. Instruction and interventions are adjusted regularly depending on the child's responses and on the progress of the general curriculum across the year's scope and sequence. The child's growth is charted to see if the additional instruction produces the desired change in performance.

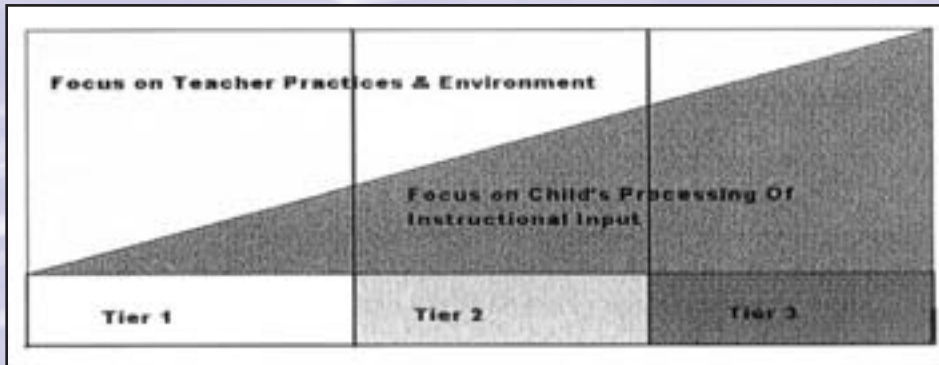
Tier 3 delivers more focused instruction and may include a referral for evaluation for special education eligibility. Performance expectations are based on Granite Preschool Developmental Standards. The RTI model is illustrated above.

Continued on page 44

Preschool

As illustrated, the primary focus of change based on assessment results moves from the teacher and the learning environment in Tier 1 to the individual child's processing in Tier 3. In Tier 1, the initial examination of data should be on the performance of all children. If the general performance of the class is not meeting expectations or moving in the direction of those expectations, the focus of attention is on the teacher's instructional strategies. The teacher together with the early literacy coach evaluates the instruction on several dimensions:

Are the instructional practices effective and based on scientific research? Is each instructional activity purposeful, skill based, engaging, and developmentally appropriate? Is the teaching following the scope and sequence of the curriculum and the district standards? As a result of this examination, the teacher plans changes in the learning environment and instructional practices to do better.





In Tier 2, the primary focus is more evenly divided with attention to the further refinement of teaching and environmental strategies as well as focus on the individual learning needs of children who are not meeting the expectations or making adequate progress toward them. If the child's performance does not improve with customized Tier 2 interventions, a closer look at the child's internal processing of instructional input is conducted to determine how to address barriers to the child's learning.

In Tier 3 more attention goes to the child's individual learning needs. As the teaching team learns more about the child's processing, additional tailored strategies and interventions are implemented to improve learning. While Tier 3 interventions are being implemented, some children might be referred for special education

evaluation. Other children will be able to make adequate progress with the highly intensive interventions in Tier 3, stopping short of a special education referral. All of the data from the RTII process is stored for use as part of an eventual evaluation for eligibility under the IDEA if a referral is made at any time during preschool or early elementary school.

Outcomes of this approach have been significant improvements in the children's performance based on end of year benchmark testing as well as on the individual progress monitoring data. Entering Kindergarten students have performed well and are demonstrating knowledge and skills in early reading that will ensure success in lifelong literacy. ■

Districtwide Implementation of RTI: Year 1 Review

Response to Intervention (RTI) as part of a problem solving model provides great promise for maximizing resources to improve student outcomes. Implementation within a school district is time-consuming and usually requires changing the way things have always been done—something that is uncomfortable for everyone! Park City School District took on this task during the 2006-07 school year to implement a problem solving model that would result in a process for determining a students' response to intensive, research-validated intervention. This article will share where we started, where we are now, where we hope to end up, and a few things we have learned along the way.



Nicole Todd, School Psychologist, Park City School District

Park City began this systems change to RTI in the fall of 2006 by eliciting professional development from the Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC). We held a two-day training for our elementary level SSTs (Student Success Teams) outlining the problem solving model and providing an introduction to RTI. At that time, every elementary school had some form of a problem solving team (SST) in place. Following that training, the charge to each school was to apply RTI practices and a process that would work for their school. The result was that implementation of RTI components were the same, but looked somewhat different at each elementary school.

Problem Solving Structures

One elementary school (School #3 below) set aside several hours every Friday morning to begin systematically identifying students who were in need of additional support or intervention. The SST did not staff any students until they compiled CRT scores from the previous school year and acquired fall DIBELS scores. Students were prioritized based on perceived need, and the team began staffing weekly. A dramatic change from the then current practice occurred with this approach in that the decision to staff a student was now driven by assessment data rather than teacher referral based on perceived need. Each of the other three elementary schools continued to meet during their previously scheduled 30-40 minutes once weekly. These schools focused less on identification and more on intervention and teacher support. These problem solving teams viewed themselves as a resource that was available to provide support and ideas to teachers for Tier 1. School #2 (below) developed a file drawer full of data collection forms, many of which corresponded with an intervention. They have also trained many members of their team to conduct response-discrepancy behavior observations for behavior referrals.

Problem Solving and Special Education Referral

As the school psychologist, I began a database and have been keeping data on all the referrals made to special education throughout each school year. Some data I have collected are included below. After just one year, there appears to be a positive trend in regards to the quantity and quality of referrals to special education.

While it is early to make any absolute conclusions about our referral rates, the combined percentages above suggest that overall, more children referred to special education are qualifying for special education services when assessment is completed. Two of the schools above had rates that actually decreased, however, school #4 only made a total of 6 referrals during 2006-07, so this percentage is based on a very small number.

The referral and qualifying data indicates a trend toward identifying the students in our school district who truly have specific learning disabilities. As a school psychologist, I wonder, what is a realistic and appropriate percentage to aim for? We have also asked the question, "With excellent Tier 3 intervention in place, how does special education programming differ once a child is qualified than what they were receiving at the Tier 3 level?" The answer, for us, is that the difference is not in level of instructional intensity, and perhaps special education students will receive similar services, but over a longer duration. We have excellent data to inform decisions in reading and even behavior, but what about math? As we address these questions, we will likely generate even more. Is this not what keeps the field of special education interesting and challenging?

Plans for the Future

At the beginning of this school year, a representative from UPDC attended a meeting with our elementary administrators to discuss our progress in implementation after this first year. After reviewing U-PASS and DIBELS data, the group concluded that the greatest effects will likely be observed from evaluating and supplementing our Tier 1 programs in general education classrooms. As a district, increasing the effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction will be the district focus for professional development and RTI efforts for the 2007-08 school year. Over a year into this process, it seems that we continue to generate more questions. ■

Park City Elementary Schools	# of Initial Referrals to special education, 2005-2006	# of Initial Referrals to special education, 2006-2007	Percentage of Initial Referrals that qualified, 2005-06	Percentage of Initial Referrals that qualified, 2006-07
School #1	5	13(+260%)	60	85
School #2	12	9 (-25%)	58	89
School #3	6	6 (+0%)	56	50
School #4	23	3	67	50
Combined	46	31(-33%)	59	68

"They laugh at me, these fellows, just because I am small. They laugh at me because I'm not a hundred feet tall. I tell 'em there's a lot to learn here on the ground. The world is big but little people turn it around."

So goes the jaunty tune from *Les Miserables*. But is it true? Do the little people make things happen? And within the world of RTI, do the little people and the little schools exist? We unequivocally sing out YES! Little schools turn it around. Our school, Helen M. Knight Intermediate School (HMK) in Moab, is little. We have 335 students in grades 4-6, with 45% free or reduced lunch. Our faculty consists of 19 licensed teachers and 11 paraeducators. We do not have a school data team, curriculum team, reading specialist, or literary coach operating in the district, just us, our vision and our commitment!



Little Schools

The first to catch the vision was our principal, Margaret Hopkin, and a special education teacher, Brandy Shumway. They began with the first essential need: the goal to increase the reading fluency of medium-low rated students. "We were continually frustrated as students were tested for special education and found they did not qualify," Shumway said. At that time, HMK was testing around 10 new students per year for special education and only about 3 were qualifying each year. "The hard part was to watch as the students who desperately needed a little more help, go back to their classrooms and continue to struggle. Basically, for them, nothing changed because we didn't have a way to track them and their progress." By following the 3 Tier Model, we have made significant changes for these students. Last year our special education referrals dropped from 10 to 3 students. Of the 3 students who were referred for assistance through special education, two students received that assistance and one was given assistance through our new 3 Tier Model. Now students who would have been referred to special education are given intensive assistance before they are ever identified as needing special education assistance. They receive specialized instruction from a team of educators who look out for their individual needs. The educators included are the regular education teacher, the title one teachers, the ESL teacher, the special education teachers, and the paraeducators. As a collaborative group, they problem solve and plan ways to help increase the student's learning.

Collaboration was the key component to initiating a tiered program. A collaboration room was established for meetings and data display boards. Our collaboration team met daily during the first three weeks to train, organize, and plan. *The Fluent Reader* by Timothy V. Rasinski was used as a training tool and contributed greatly to our understanding of new strategies and best practices in developing reading skills in

young readers. We continued training with DIBELS, provided by Utah Personnel Development Center, and shared the materials and strategies we had been using.

In order to establish a baseline with continued benchmarks, we organized a "DIBELS in a Day" event and collected data, using parent volunteers. We put the students' pictures on 3x5 cards, along with their data, and arranged them in tiers on bulletin boards. The team then analyzed each grade level's board, in relationship to the resources we had available. After reviewing the school's daily schedule, we chose the only time of the day that students would not be pulled out of their regular classroom. In order to bring students' scores to a grade level proficiency, we chose to use their exploratory, or "specials" time. The schedule allowed 30 students per grade level to receive 1:6 (teacher:student) fluency instruction. Within this group of students, 15 per grade level were chosen to receive 1:3 (teacher:student) targeted phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction. Individual intervention strategies for each student were designed based on a series of screening assessments.

A Tier 2 cycle of instruction was developed and initiated (see figure 1 on p. 51). Once the program was functioning, the collaboration team continued to meet on a weekly basis. During this meeting resources were pooled to meet the needs of any difficulties encountered with a student's intervention or with the program itself.

With everyone cooperating within the school to run this schedule, we encountered a weak link in the strong chain of support: parent involvement. In an effort to strengthen this link, the team decided to build a connection to home support. Julie Durfee, our Title One

"The first to catch the vision was our principal, Margaret Hopkin, and a special education teacher, Brandy Shumway. They began with the first essential need: the goal to increase the reading fluency of medium-low rated students."

educator, began conducting home visits. As an incentive for the students to read, she brought snacks to the parents so they could reward their children for participating in the "at-home-read-aloud" time. Julie also brought instructions, plans and strategies for the parents to work on with their students. This did in fact bridge the gap between home and school by giving parents tools to work with, resources that were interesting and fun, and an acknowledgement of their importance in their student's progress. The parents genuinely displayed appreciation for both the time and resources given to them. This teacher and the parents felt rewarded for their efforts, and best of all, the students were the ones to truly profit from the time and attention they applied to becoming more fluent readers.

The RTI approach is rewarding for both students and teachers. Ms. Paskett, an ALS teacher, shares her feelings: "Teaching is the most rewarding profession anyone could choose to spend their life doing. What makes teaching so gratifying? The answer is easy. Having a mother stop me on the street and, with tears in her eyes, thank me for teaching her fourth grader to read when everyone else had given up. When a mother expresses how amazed she is that her child has made so much progress in such a short period of time. When another mother says that she was amazed that her fourth-grader was so willing to work so hard for me when no one else had been able to reach him. (His reading improved 2 1/2 grade levels in the year that I taught him. He was so amazing.) When I get notes like the one mentioned above taped to my door (even though the spelling was somewhat creative), I know that I

Turn it Around



Results even from one year have been astounding. "This has been the best reading program that Kris has been involved in; for the first time in his life, Kris enjoys reading," writes a parent. "The Tier program is wonderful! It has helped my son and many other students. Scheduling is kind of difficult, but as long as there is good communication, it works out fine," comments a speech teacher. And from a student in a note to his Tier 2 teacher, "Dear, Ms. Paskett I was going to tell you that I past but that was very close I got 118 and so I just want to tell you thanx for helping me with it k so thanx bye from: Bobby."

have made a difference in my little corner of the world and that lives have been changed for the better. These are the things that make my profession worthwhile, the reasons I am proud to say 'I am a teacher!'"

Skilled paraeducators are a vital resource within our collaboration team. Mrs. Godschalx, a part-time paraeducator, relates the following: "My experience with below level fluency (disfluent) readers has taken me back to the basics (so to speak). I use a basic phonics program combined with high-frequency word lists, and 1-minute timings with student partners. Through the 1-minute timing method, children learn the value of automatic word recognition. In addition to the benefits of learning the sound-spelling relationship of phonic rules, students learn self-esteem. The kids have fun competing and recording their own progress. Also partner reading builds cooperative and respectful relationships. This allows children who rarely get a chance to teach, or to take charge, an opportunity to flourish. They correct and record their progress, as well as their partner's progress, and learn to give positive feedback to each other. In reading, as in any sports competition, the adage 'practice makes perfect' is driven home. Kids learn that reading can be a sport that is equally rewarding and fun. Reading fluency is coupled with reading comprehension. When the student is no longer struggling with decoding, he then can focus on context clues more successfully. Thereby he can understand the content more easily. The reading program has been extremely rewarding to me. When a child says, 'I didn't like to read before, and now I do,' or she wants to practice longer and be timed again and again to improve her fluency rate, you know it's working! And I smile!"

Continued on page 50

The tier model is supported by more than the collaboration team, it has been a school-wide effort. Exploratory teachers have been flexible and willing to adjust their lesson plans. Secretaries carry the burden of an extra workload in monitoring attendance. Our faithful custodians have dealt with the logistics of setting up rooms and bulletin boards. The principal has supported these efforts by informing parents about the model, dealing with parent and staff questions, and resolving concerns.

The HMK tiered program is a work in progress. We had such success last year targeting fluency with our Tier 2 students, that this year we are expanding our efforts. Through our collaboration during team meetings, we are targeting the Tier 3 students to increase their interventions. Certified teachers within this team have adjusted their schedules to provide engaging activities on a 3 to 1 basis. Future plans include progress monitoring in writing and comprehension, acquiring research-based materials, and collaborating with regular education teachers.

Even with all of the anxiety and frustration that comes with change, as a school, we still sing out. One fourth grade teacher, who recently moved from Las Vegas, epitomizes our little school's sentiments, "What I like about a little school is that it's less likely that a child will fall through the cracks." Or in the paraphrased lyrics of Herbert Kretzmer, *"The world is big, but little [schools] turn it around."*

Collaboration team: Brandy Shumway, Arlajean Paskett, Julie Durfee, Sharon Leavitt, Frankie Law, Bill Godschalx, Pam Godschalx, Bonnie Wilcox, Patty Meierdierks, Jan Mefret, Necia Martin, TeCara Lawley, Margaret Hopkin

HMK 2006-2007 Tier 2 Statistics

Grade Level	Oral Language	Decode & Spelling	Vocabulary	Reading Comprehension	Total
Third to Fourth	-0.29	-8.82	2.44	7.06	-0.59
Fourth to Fifth	0.08	4.72	0.40	-4.34	-1.59
Fifth to Sixth	17.50	1.67	8.54	12.46	8.17

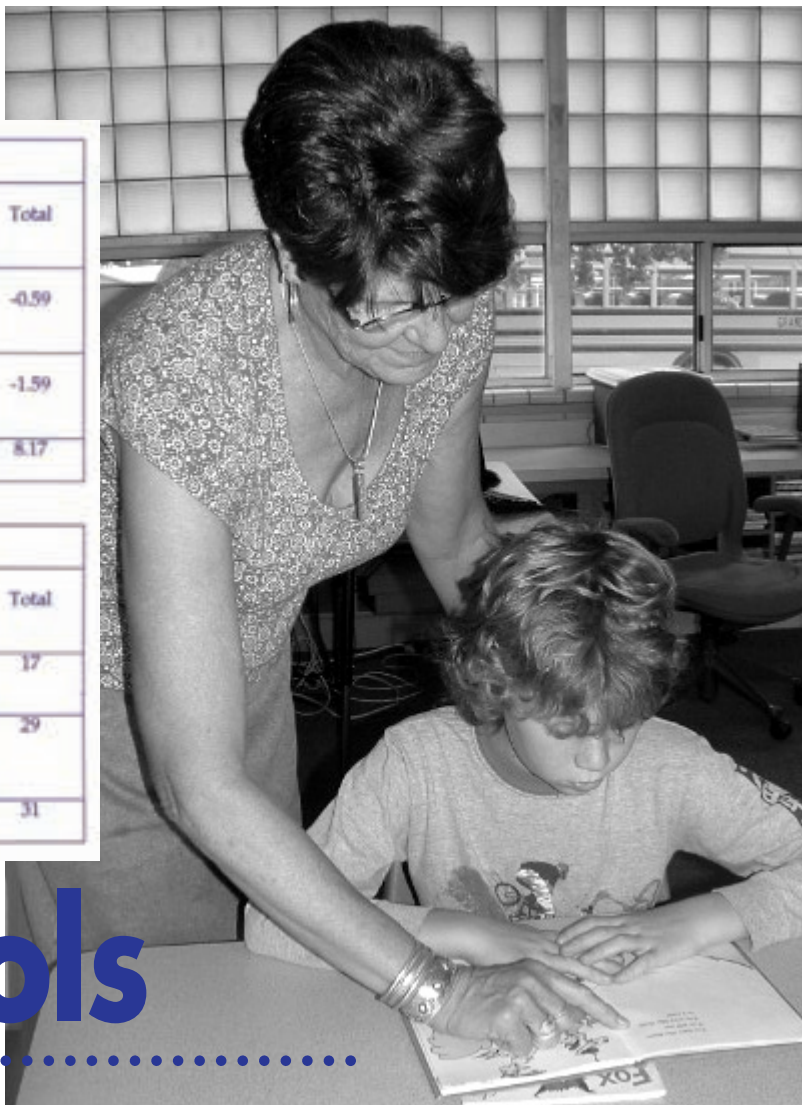
Grade Level	Oral Language	Decode & Spelling	Vocabulary	Reading Comprehension	Total
Third to Fourth	60	50	35	55	17
Fourth to Fifth	60	62	31	46	29
Fifth to Sixth	60	50	54	37	31

Extraordinary gains were achieved by some individual students with their CRT scores; however, the average score was slightly down. The scores do not account for what the CRT score would have been without intervention. The team hypothesizes that the CRT score will improve with fluency, but there may be a lag time behind it.

Grade Level	Average CWPM Increase	Percentage
Fourth to Fifth	22	38%
Fifth to Sixth	26	34%
Sixth	Not available	

Grade Level	CWPM Increase	Percentage
Fourth to Fifth	51	102%
Fifth to Sixth	51	78%
Sixth	Not available	

Significant improvement was achieved and maintained in the DIBELS benchmark scores from September 2006 to September 2007. ■



Little Schools

Turn It Around

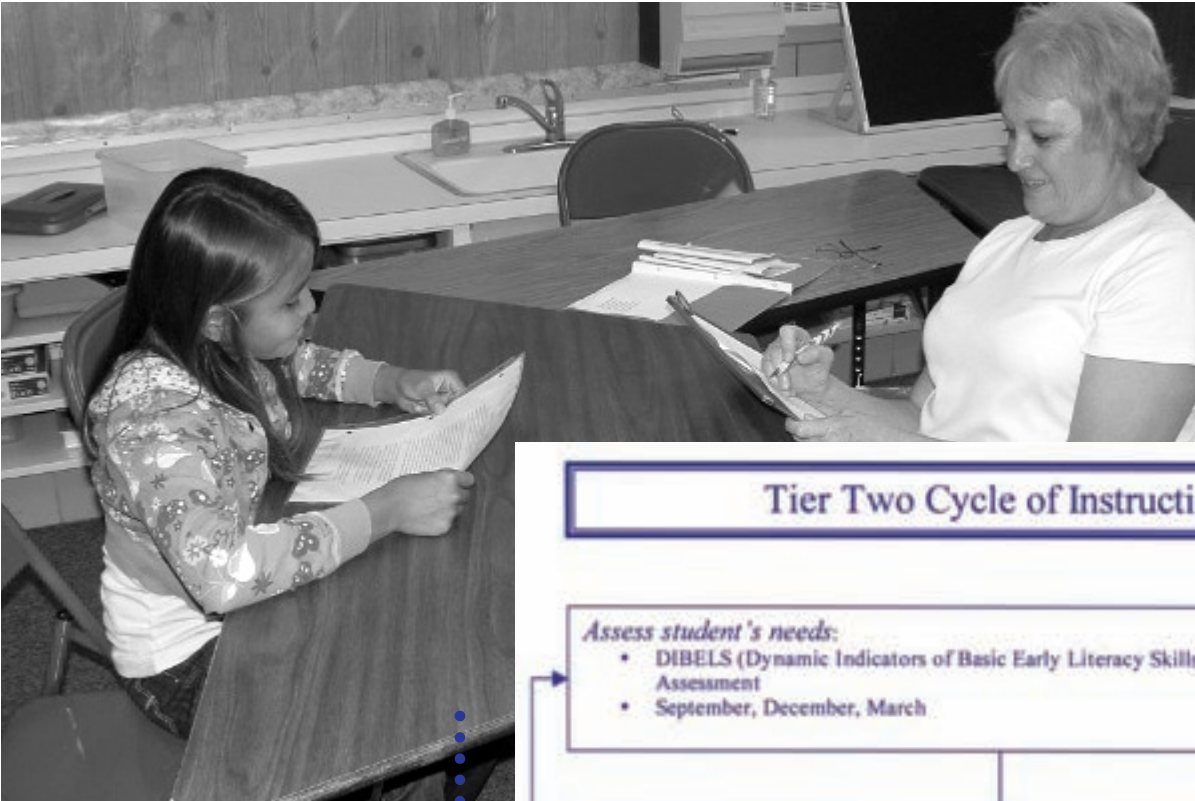
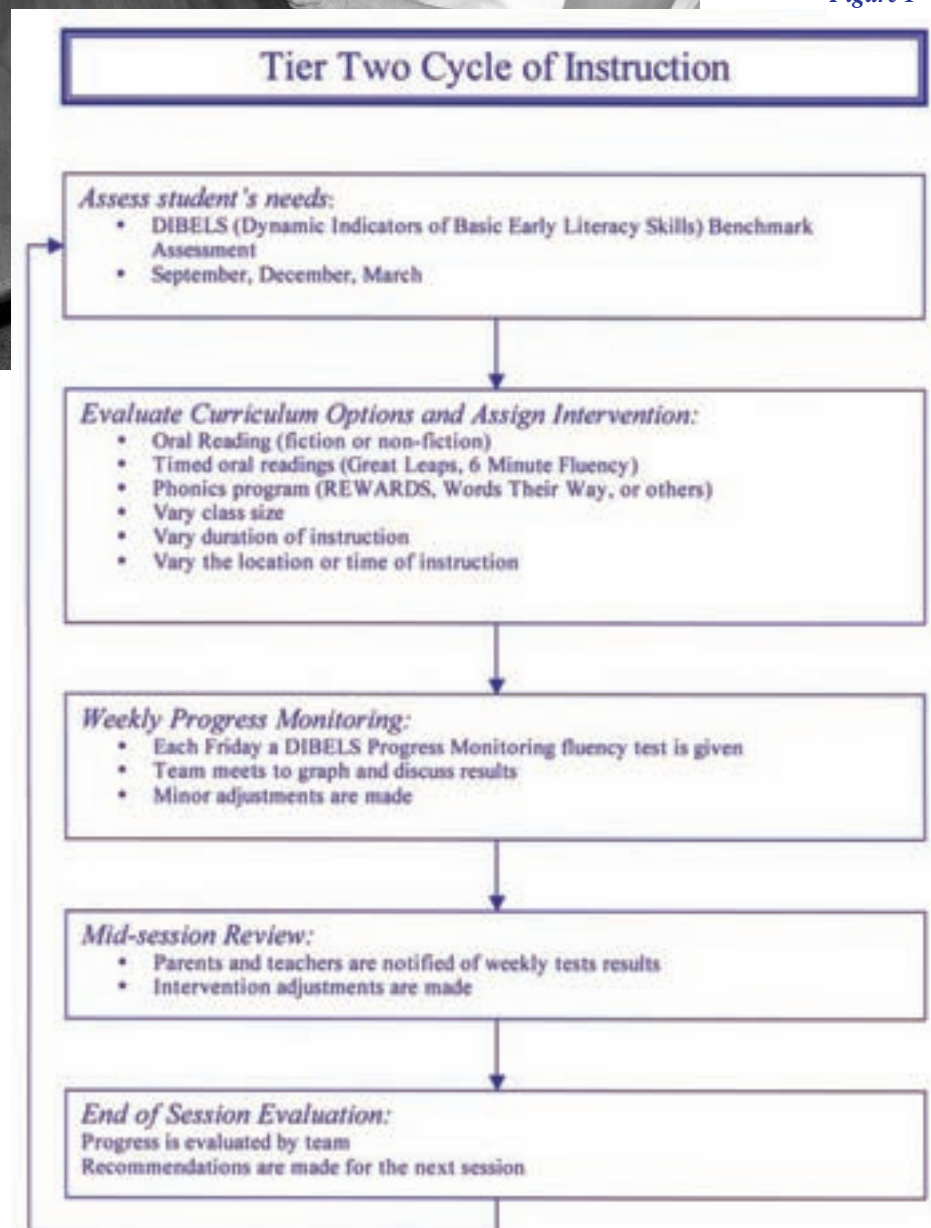


Figure 1



The Tier Two cycle of instruction is HMK's plan to individualize instruction. The flow-chart shows the cycle we follow for each instructional session. We have three sessions per year.

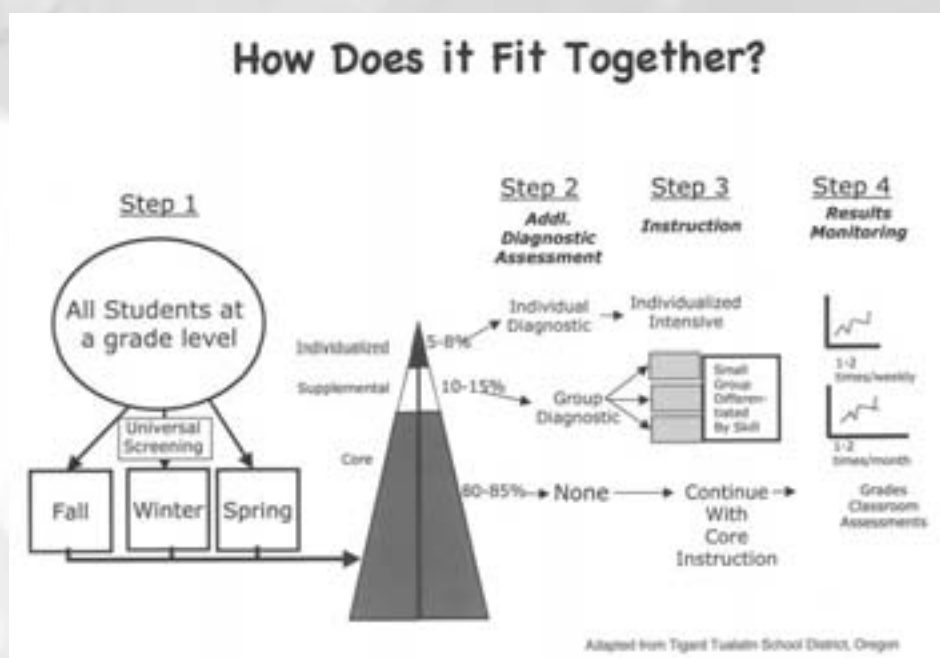


Randy Schelble, Director of Exceptional Children Services, Salt Lake City School District

When policymakers included a local school district's option to use a Response to Intervention (RTI) method for specific learning disabilities classification in the IDEA 2004 statute and federal regulations, sense making for local school districts began. Translating policy into practice is always a journey; a journey that involves creating a road map of the intended outcomes, providing a clear direction with mile markers to measure progress toward full implementation, acknowledging detours that occur, and responding to the age-old question of "are we there yet?" I would like to share the journey we began four years ago in implementing a RTI model. Many individuals and departments are passengers on the "RTI bus" as it has rumbled along toward its destination of implementing RTI as a specific learning disability classification option.

The Journey Begins

The journey began in the fall of 2004 while the reauthorization of IDEA was still being debated in Congress. Gathering information about RTI was the first step. This included reviewing RTI research (e.g., Denton, C.; Fletcher, J.; Fuchs, D. and Fuchs, L.; Tilly, D.; Torgesen, J. K.), reading policy documents from various organizations, and identifying how other states and local school districts (e.g., Iowa, Kentucky, Oregon, Rhode Island) had begun to implement RTI. This process helped to operationalize what RTI could look like for Salt Lake City School district.



Response to Intervention: One District's Journey of Translating Policy into Practice

Three components were identified in this first stage.

1. A universal screening instrument needed to be used by schools to benchmark all students and identify those students who were at risk of failure;
2. School teams needed to determine how a three-tier model of instruction would work at their schools to provide interventions to identified students; and,
3. School teams needed to become comfortable with using a problem solving model to determine next steps for students who are not making expected progress.

Initially only special education teachers used DIBELS to benchmark at grade level three times a year and regularly progress monitor students at their instructional level. Coaching and support were provided by Rob Richardson, including his monthly newsletter, the *DIBELS Digest*, which shared data, results, and successful reading interventions.

Through collaboration with the Curriculum and Assessment Departments, three years ago DIBELS became the universal screening instrument used at all elementary schools in Salt Lake City School District. The Assessment Department now provides assessment teams who are scheduled to go to each elementary school three times a year to benchmark all students. For many schools, DIBELS serves as a tool for identifying students who need additional tier 2 interventions.

For the past four years district staff and schools have focused on using data to make decisions about instruction and interventions for students at risk. The district's Accountability and Assessment Department provides each school with meaningful data and support in interpreting school wide, grade level, and individual student CRT results. Understanding that data is only as meaningful as what is done with it, many elementary schools have created visual supports, such as an assessment wall, to remain focused on how individual students are responding to instruction and intervention.

An important factor in this process is that data-based decisions are school-level driven with district-level support provided to schools. Schools have moved forward in determining how a three-tier model of instruction would work at their school in order to provide interventions to identified students. Throughout this process, there have been multiple opportunities to learn more about implementation of effective interventions. For example:

- For the past two years, teachers in grades K through 3 have received extensive professional development through the Curriculum Department in scientifically research-based reading instruction as well as strategies and interventions for students at risk.
- Literacy coaches assigned to elementary schools coach and support to classroom teachers in the implementation of research-based strategies and interventions.



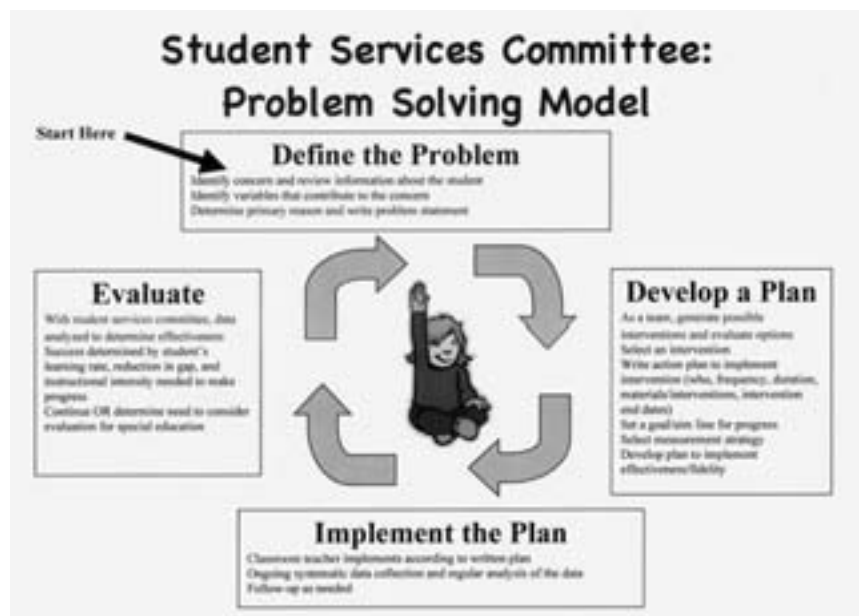
- Some elementary schools have implemented a Booster Group model for students at risk, which has included using resource teachers and/or speech language pathologists providing targeted intensive interventions for non-special education students for no longer than 12 weeks.
- Beginning this school year, two elementary schools are using a Power Hour model. Staff (ESL, Resource teachers, paraprofessionals, classroom teachers) are scheduled for an hour at each grade level so that small group interventions can be implemented. Staff have been trained in Next Steps and Early Steps as an intervention strategy. Students are grouped according progress monitoring data, and group sizes range from 3 to 5 students.

Continued on page 54



The final component in the initial stage of introducing RTI to Salt Lake City School District was refining a problem solving model to identify next steps for students who are not making expected progress. Two years ago, the Special Education Department and the Curriculum Department introduced to selected elementary schools a “learning from student work” process focused on a problem solving model. The model involved the classroom teacher sharing with a school team (principal, specialists, other teachers) student work of a student who was not making expected progress. Through the “learning from student work” process, targeted interventions were then identified to implement with the student. Although the “learning from student work” process has not continued as originally designed, it has served as the basis for introducing the problem solving model to elementary school Student Services Committees.

To support a problem solving model, it was determined that schools needed a tool to help identify factors that could be impacting a student’s achievement as well as begin to document the required elements of the RTI process. For the past year, the Special Education Department has been developing an Intervention Documentation form for schools to use as they review existing information about a student at risk. The development of the Intervention Documentation form went through multiple revisions with feedback from school psychologists, other district departments, teachers, principals, and speech/language pathologists to ensure that it was not overly burdensome, not intrusive in how the information was asked, and provided meaningful



information for a school’s Student Services Committee to use with the problem solving model.

The Intervention Documentation form guides a teacher in providing information about the student in following areas: (1) cumulative file review information including schools attended, attendance, discipline records, vision screening results, hearing screening results, medical concerns; (2) level of English language development and alternative language services provided to the student; (3) academic information

(CRT results, DIBELS results, other academic information); (4) motivational factors that could impact a student's performance; (5) environmental, cultural and economic factors; (6) situational trauma indicators; (7) classroom teacher observations in comparison to peers; and (8) interventions attempted. When used in conjunction with a problem solving model, the Student Services Committee should be able to determine appropriate interventions to implement by reviewing the needs of a student who is having difficulties; identifying possible reasons; and helping the classroom teacher to identify targeted interventions to implement for a specified period of time.

- Early strategic intervention can prevent a child from being identified as a child with a disability.

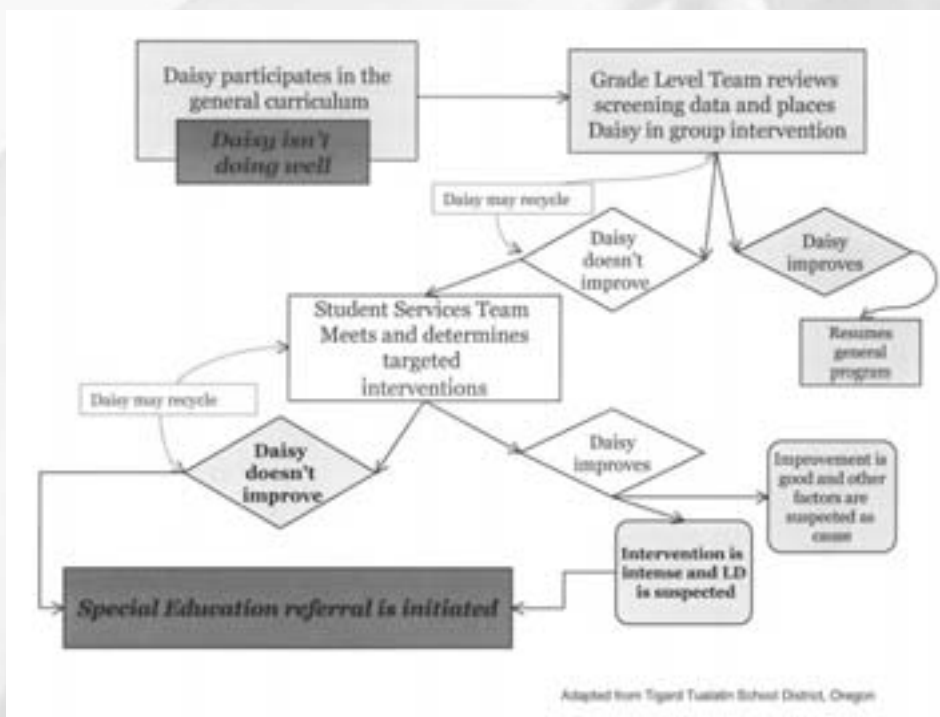
To support schools in implementing a RTI model as an option for specific learning disability classification, several supportive activities are being provided throughout this school year. By starting small, we felt that we would better be able to ensure that the process was implemented consistently at all schools and with fidelity.

A series of four topical trainings are scheduled for school teams to attend throughout the school year to provide guidance and clarification:

September—Introduction to the RTI process, November—Using the Intervention Document form and the Problem Solving Model to identify targeted interventions, January—Reviewing data results, fidelity of implementation and determining if the student is responding to the intervention, March—Next steps in the evaluation process. Besides information presented on each session's topic, these trainings are intended to provide schools an opportunity to dialogue around what's working and what's not working in shifting from a discrepancy model to a response to intervention model. At the end of the year, implementation by schools will be evaluated and needed adjustment in the process will be made.

Additional activities during this implementation year include:

- School-based faculty training on the RTI process by the special education consultants and school psychologists;
- Developing a parent information flyer to inform parents about the Response to Intervention model;
- Creating decision rules as guidelines for school teams to use for kindergarten and first/second grade students;
- Defining the role of the school psychologist, speech language pathologist, classroom teacher, special education teacher in the RTI model; and,
- Implementing the LD Guidelines that are being developed by the state office of education once they become available.



The Journey Continues

When the journey began four years ago, it started as a Special Education initiative in anticipation of IDEA 2004's inclusion of response to intervention in the statute. Many passengers have boarded the "RTI bus" as it moves forward toward the destination of implementing RTI as a method of specific learning disability classification at the school level. Passengers include school teams, the Curriculum Department, the Accountability and Assessment Department, school psychologists, and literacy coaches.

After four years of moving toward our final destination of using RTI, the 2007-2008 school year became the year of implementation. For initial implementation, we decided to introduce the RTI model in grades K-3 and in the area of reading only. Several factors influenced this decision:

- The majority of RTI research has focused on reading in the primary grades;
- The focus on literacy professional development in grades K-3 by the district in the past three years has given grade level teachers substantial information regarding research-based instruction and interventions;
- The USOE document, *Utah's 3-Tier Model for Reading Instruction*, provides guidance; and,

"Are we there yet?"

As John Kotter wrote, "Leaders establish the vision for the future and set the strategy for getting there; they cause change." Anytime a journey begins, it is only natural to want to get to the destination as quickly as possible. With the re-authorization of IDEA 2004, RTI became part of our vocabulary, and identifying what is necessary to implement an RTI model is a systems change.

Salt Lake City School District is "not there yet" in implementing a RTI model. However, we are using a roadmap to get us where we want to be and checking our mileposts in getting to where we want to be. The direction we are heading includes involving stakeholders in the decision making process and providing assistance to not only understand the process but also to be a meaningful participant in the process. ■

FLIPBOOK

Improving Results of Child Study Teams: the Problem-Solving Flipbook

This is an exciting time in which science has so much to say about educational domains such as reading instruction and behavior management. Teachers have a considerable amount to glean from the work of research, and in many cases they are gleaning away. When there is good science to be had, it should serve as a platform on which teachers perform their work. That is a major thrust of NCLB, IDEA '04, and RTI.

A thrilling aspect about teaching is that we work on the frontier, frequently dealing with situations that extend just beyond the supply lines of research. While standing on the shoulders of evidence-based practice, we need solutions to problems that researchers have not gotten around to investigating (or haven't yet figured out how to investigate) and answer questions that researchers may not yet have asked. Not only can problems we encounter be novel, but the solutions available to even standard problems may be unique. This may be due to the characteristics of an individual student and perhaps to personalities, philosophies, training and resources available in a particular school and community. In the cash- and time-strapped public schools, creative solutions which play to strengths are a must: the strengths and knowledge base of existing personnel, the strengths of organizational structures in place, the strengths of the community resources, the strengths of individual families, and the strengths of the student to be helped.

Child Study Teams and Their Problems

To effectively marshal these individual, school and community resources, there needs to be a team of people with varying perspectives, intervention expertise and knowledge of available resources who can use creativity to piece the elements together into a well-targeted, cohesive and manageable plan. There are too many variables for one individual to do this effectively; but in a group it begins to be

manageable. These problem-solving teams have been around for ages under such names as Child Study Teams (CST), Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT), Student Services Council (SSC), Prereferral Intervention Team (PIT), Intervention Assistance Team (IAT), Mainstream Assistance Teams (MAT), Instructional Consultation Teams (ICT), and Instructional Support Teams (IST). Having a solution generating team is a great idea and undoubtedly such teams have brought about powerful positive changes in teaching and student outcomes. I've seen it.

However, these teams of professionals are expensive (in terms of money and time) and are all too frequently frustratingly inefficient and ineffective. In my experience difficulties result from not sufficiently defining the problem to be solved, not focusing on variables that can be altered, not finding a suitable way to measure whether or not progress is being made, by agreeing with a perceived expert and not thinking through drawbacks of options and by being drawn off task in the flurry of diverse and occasionally disconnected ideas flying through the air.

It is understandable why intervention groups would be fraught with these difficulties. First, problems don't get sufficiently defined because it is good therapy to just blow off steam and vent frustration without an aim toward fixing the problem. Having a sympathetic and supportive ear can be more appealing than hearing ideas that may mean more work or hearing about solutions you have already thought of. However, these problem-solving groups are designed to solve problems, not provide teacher therapy. (Although that too can also be an outcome of such groups. And incidentally, good therapy involves not just catharsis but also re-designing coping strategies.)

Second, the teacher has been throwing his/her heart into a difficult situation with unsatisfying results. As a matter of just saving face, there is an understandable motivation to depict the presenting problem in its



full glory with all its intricacy and intractability. As a presenting teacher you don't want your colleagues to think an easy problem has got you flummoxed. You want them to see that this really is a supremely difficult situation (impossible in fact) with the most crucial variables being out of your control. "The parents are unsupportive." "Bad home environment." "Dad is sleeping around." "The student has ADHD and isn't medicated." "The student has a low IQ." "His genes make him do it." These things may well be true and be major contributors to the problem, but if they are not something YOU (as a teacher or as a school) can do anything about, it will not help the student if you spend too much time talking about them. It might promote sympathy but not solutions. The problem is that in addition to promoting sympathy it also promotes thinking that there is nothing that can be done. You will have a greater tendency to raise the white flag and lower your expectations.

Third, identifying a problem in clear measurable terms is difficult. Even with practice it takes effort. Furthermore, taking ongoing measurements can be a real hassle. If you don't see progress it is negatively reinforcing; and sometimes if you do see progress it is also negatively reinforcing. (If this was a solvable problem, shouldn't you have been able to figure it out by yourself? You're the professional...Or, now you are going to have this high-needs student in your class for the rest of the year. And, it was looking so much like he was going to be placed elsewhere.)

Fourth, it is well documented in the social psychology literature that people are susceptible to something known as "group think." We are pre-programmed to take on other's perspectives and agree with dominant group members or a majority of group members. Less

dominant members downplay their ability to judge situations and generate solutions and simply differ to others. Brains shut off and wander. In brief, a mob mentality can kick in and less than optimal decisions can be made.

Fifth, individual members of the group each have dozens of questions and ideas buzzing around in their heads like swarms of bees that periodically escape out of their mouths. With so many ideas and questions in the air it is difficult to organize it all. Some people will be trying to solve one problem while others will be trying to solve another, while others are simultaneously busy trying to figure out what the problem is. Herding these bees into formation requires a sequential structure—hence a problem-solving protocol which can provide a visual prompt to keep everyone on the same page and the bees flying in recognizable formation.


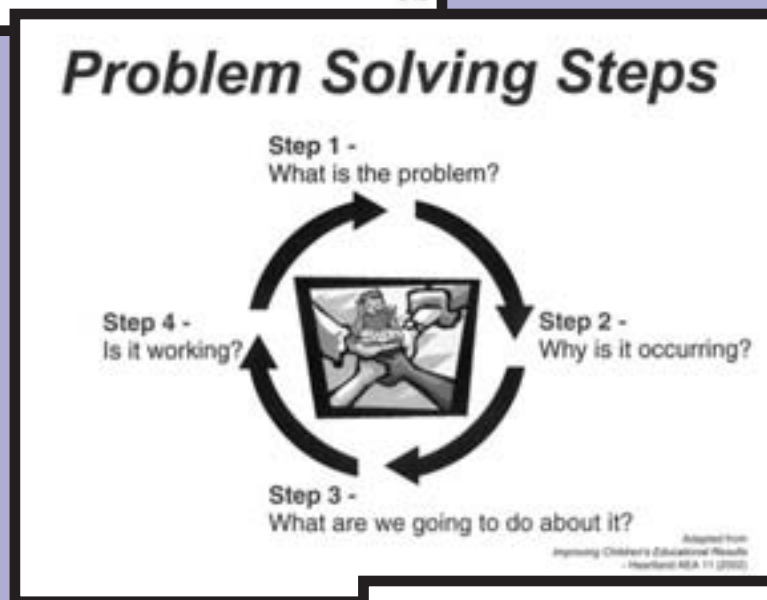
The Flipbook Solution

To overcome these difficulties common in problem solving teams, Whittier Elementary (under the leadership of Jane Fitts, Geoff Griffin, Joanne Otteson, and Susi Hauser) has employed the use of a flip chart with explicit steps that the group is to follow. So far it has worked beautifully. Whittier was never the gossip central that problem-solving (or perhaps more appropriately: problem-admiring) teams can be. Nevertheless, where we used to talk about a student and come up with a plan in 40 minutes to an hour, we now can have a more focused discussion in 20 minutes. Half the time and with a better result!

Continued on page 58

FLIPBOOK SOLUTION

The complete Problem Solving Flipbook is available for download at:
www.updc.speducator.org



What is the Problem?

Goal: To define the problem as the measurable difference between what is expected and the observed student behavior or performance.

$P = E - O$

- Determine if problem is individual, small group, or large group.
- What is the desired level of performance?
- What is the student's level of performance?
- What is the difference between the two?

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There are several protocols that are used in the Salt Lake District, the most common is *Learning from Student Work* in which the team looks at students' work and generates ideas on how to improve performance through alterations of curriculum or instruction. I will describe another problem-solving protocol that I particularly like because it can be used for any sort of problem—academic, behavioral, or even organizational. I also like how it tends to clarify the aim of identifying the problem. This problem-solving protocol was developed out of collaboration with lots of folk. It has been adapted from a protocol used in Heartland AEA 11 (in Iowa) by Clark Doorman (in Florida) from whom we obtained it. We placed pages listing protocol steps in clear plastic paper-protectors and affixed them in a three-hole, stand-up easel. This is the technology that keeps us on task. (See picture featuring the very dashing Geoff Griffin, special education teacher extraordinaire.)

At the beginning of a problem solving session, we assign roles to group members. This also helps keep us on task and combats “group think.” Roles include the presenting teacher, the facilitator, a scribe and the time keeper. If we were not already such a cantankerous group we could also include a devil's advocate role (a yeah but...role) to stir things up and keep us from premature agreement. While we are not deliberate about switching roles from session to session, this can also be a way of keeping the “group think” phenomena at bay.

The first step of the problem-solving protocol is to identify the problem. A problem is defined as the measurable difference between expected and observed performance of a student. For example, suppose we expect a student to stay in her assigned area (desk or carpet), but instead she is bolting out of the classroom an average of four times a day. How severe is the problem? It's 4-bolts severe. Or, to take another example, perhaps we expect a second grade student to be increasing the number of words read correctly on a grade-level passage at the rate of 1.5 words read correctly per week, given the progress that others in school have been making (or given DIBELS benchmarks) but the student is only progressing at a rate of around 0.3 words read correctly per week. The difference between expectation and student performance is a bit over one word per week growth. Once we have made the problem measurable, when we get to step 4, we can quantify whether what we are doing is making things better, worse or not having a discernable effect. In step 3, we can set goals. And when the intervention is implemented, teachers and students will be able to get immediate feedback on progress.

This first step may sound easy. Sometimes it is. Often it is not. It can be difficult to get specific about what the behavior you want to see looks like, and in some cases it can also be difficult to select which are the most pressing (or solvable) problems from the wide array the student exhibits. (It would certainly be nice if students were allowed no more than one or two problems at a time.) Fortunately problems can be grouped around a common function (like escaping doing math worksheets) or one problem presents as being more fundamental, underlying other problems (non-compliance causing escalations and tantruming; or poor decoding skills causing poor fluency, slow vocabulary acquisition and dismal comprehension).

In this first step, the presenting teacher brings data and stories and typically has some clear ideas about where the problem is. The other group members ask questions and help prioritize, focus, and define the problem in clear measurable terms. We aim to get this step nailed down in five to ten minutes. Most frequently we accomplish this aim. Sometimes we define the problem, but not in a way that is quantifiable. This is less than optimal but still be helpful.

The second step involves identifying why the problem is occurring. Data are analyzed to determine what alterable variables might be getting in the way of resolving the problem. Is there something about the curriculum, the instruction, the environment that could help enhance child learning or support positive behaviors? For example, is the child who bolts from her assigned area trying to escape work demands? If so, is she capable of doing the work? If not, how can the work be taught or scaffolded so it is not so aversive? What about a child who is not progressing in reading at an appropriate rate. Is he getting enough practice? Is he sufficiently motivated? Does he have proper word analysis skills? Are there language or vocabulary skill deficits that get in the way? This step typically takes five minutes when the bees are kept flying in formation.

In the third step, a specific plan is made. It involves deciding what to do about the problem with an eye toward what to teach, how to teach it, and how to structure the environment to facilitate resolution. Here is where we determine who will do what by when. We have found that if we don't have a scribe who writes these specifics down, they can easily be forgotten and things don't get done. Also important at this stage is to agree on how progress is going to be measured, by whom and what an acceptable improvement rate might look like. In the problem identification stage (stage 1) we determine a measure of the problem at baseline, but we need a workable, ongoing way to measure progress. The measurement piece is easy to overlook but it is important for several reasons: often change is slow and if it is not measured and documented you might miss it; and furthermore setting goals and monitoring progress offers highly motivating feedback for teachers and very frequently for students, which intensifies the effectiveness of the intervention. Setting goals offers a challenge and monitoring progress helps you determine what helps and what doesn't. This step typically involves 5 minutes if you dig in and have properly completed the earlier steps.

The fourth step involves revisiting the problem with data in hand. Did it work? Was the plan implemented as planned? If not, why not? What barriers were bumped into? How can barriers be removed? What can be done to tune up the plan to make it better? Or, does the plan need to be scrapped in favor another? In which case, start the process over again beginning with identification of the problem. We typically schedule a review of cases for some date down the road (maybe three weeks). Perhaps our follow-up could be improved by having a liaison check in with the teacher at regular intervals or make decision rules that trigger revisitation at shorter or longer intervals: if Sally has an average rate of bolting of less than one instance per week we will not revisit until next month; however, if Sally's rate of bolting stays the same or increases, then we will revisit next week. I suspect that some of this sort of flexible data-based decision-making might already be happening behind the scenes, but certainly it has not been my doing. This may be one of those many areas in which we, as a problem solving team, could improve. Perhaps we should run our problem-solving procedure through itself.

Conclusion

Problem solving teams offer great potential to positively impact troublesome behaviors and shore up academic deficiencies at individual student, classroom and school levels. They have the potential to aid teachers in navigating territory when research supply lines have run thin. However, these teams can be frustratingly inefficient and ineffective for a variety of reasons. Our approach has been to structure the process by establishing roles and following a prescribed, step-by-step process that is outlined on easel for all to see and that leads us from problem identification, to problem analysis, to plan development, to plan evaluation. We have plenty of aspects on which to improve, but evidence so far suggests we are on the right track. ■



Lisa Crane, Special Education Teacher, Salina Elementary, Sevier School District

Having recently purchased a new vehicle, I have had the privilege of experiencing a free year of *On Star*. Initially, I thought of the conveniences afforded by this service as those of rescue or recovery. If I locked my keys in my car, I could have it unlocked via satellite just by making a simple phone call; or if my vehicle was stolen, it would be easier to locate. About a month after my purchase, I was pleasantly surprised when I received an e-mail regarding the status of the vital systems within my vehicle. Additionally, this monthly update provided notice of any action or preventative maintenance that may have been needed.

At this point, you may be wondering, “What is an article on *On Star* doing in the Special Educator?” My purpose is not to sell you a subscription to this GM product (however, at this point you may be seriously considering it). My objective is to familiarize you with the concept of data team meetings. Like the monthly *On Star* reports, data team meetings provide ongoing communication regarding the vital systems functioning within the school. When functioning properly, data team meetings can also provide educators with a warning as deficiencies (at the school, class, and student level) are brought to light, and the team seeks to intervene with preventative action.

What Are The Essential Components of Quality Data Team Meetings?

Dr. Douglas Reeves of the Center for Performance Assessment outlines the following.

- **Collect and Chart Data:** What is the total percentage of students who are proficient or higher? What is the total percentage of students who are not proficient? Convert the percentage to actual students by name.
- **Analyze Strengths and Obstacles:** What are the strengths of the students who are proficient? What are the specific weaknesses and inconsistent

skills of the non-proficient students? What trends or patterns do these students show in failing to apply certain skills?

- **Set Goals—Example:** “The percentage of second grade students scoring at proficiency or higher in writing will increase from 43% to 58% by the end of November as measured by a teacher-created writing prompt assessment administered on October 30th.”
- **Identify Instructional Strategies:** The team should collaborate on one or two strategies discussed and agree to implement them during the next month. As a team, review the different types of strategies. For example, learning environment strategies, program strategies and instructional strategies.
- **Results Indicators:** Simply put, the results indicators answer the following question, “If this strategy is implemented, then we should expect to see the following evidence...”

Why Data?

“Ugh! But why data?” many might ask. Can you imagine going to your doctor or mechanic only to find them making a diagnosis based on what they think they see? How comfortable would you be replacing the entire engine of your car because it just didn’t look/sound right? We trust these professionals, and countless others, to make decisions based on in depth analysis of data from a variety of sources. As professionals in the field of education, we have an obligation to do the same.

Data Team Meetings: Our School’s Model

At Salina Elementary School, grade level teams comprised of teachers and instructional assistants, meet with the school literacy team (composed of the principal, literacy coach, and special education teachers) once every five to six weeks. These data team meetings provide a structured time to collaborate and address instructional issues ranging from the school level to the student level, all the while using data as a basis for the decision making process.

Data Team Meetings: The *On Star* Service of Education

Data from formative assessments such as the TPRI, DIBELS, Open Court Assessments, SRI, and Star Early Literacy Assessments, as well as data from summative assessments, such as IOWA and CRTs, are brought to the table and reviewed. During this time, team members identify instructional weaknesses as well as student weaknesses. No stone is left unturned, so to speak, and students identified as being “at risk” are discussed in depth as the team collaborates to design appropriate, targeted interventions to meet students’ needs.

For the sake of organization, each data team meeting follows the same basic agenda. Time is set aside to discuss instructional decisions made at the Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 levels. Although instructional decisions at the Tier 1 level are included, the majority of the meeting is spent examining data and addressing the needs of at-risk (Tier 2 and Tier 3) students.

Outcomes of Data Team Meetings

It is important to note: the purpose of the meeting is not just to report data, rather, it is to collaborate to USE the data to improve instruction and bolster student achievement. A successful meeting ends with each participant (not just each teacher) leaving the meeting with:

- An understanding of where each of their students are
- Knowledge of systemic weaknesses at the school level, grade level, and class level
- Knowledge of students at risk for failure and those students’ specific need(s)/weaknesses
- A plan of action to differentiate instruction to target students’ specific needs and address instructional deficiencies

As team members collaborate on how to best meet students’ needs, they also seek to discover replicable practices that enhance and support student achievement. The focus then becomes more than just test scores, as emphasis is placed on factors that are within the control of the teachers and the school.

Collaboration/Data Team/Intervention Meeting Agenda

- I. Tier III Special Education: Lola/Lisa
Growth/Successes/Areas of Weakness Needing Scaffolding
- II. Tier II Intervention: Jade
Attendance/Progress/Growth
- III. Tier II Instructional Assistant Representative:
Great Leaps/WPM/Pre-Teaching Report/Intervention Group Report
- IV. Tier I Teachers:
Differentiated Instruction for at risk students
- V. Kids Flagged for Intervention/Borderline: Jade
Students moving among the tiers
- VI. Y.P.P. Reading & Language Data: Jade
- VII. Administrative Data: Code
- VIII. Y.P.P. Math Data: Lisa
- IX. Open Court Data: Grade Level Teachers
Look for areas of strength and weakness/share. What are specific learning needs? How will we differentiate instruction? Resources?

Just as I have come to rely on the monthly reports I receive from *On Star*, I have also become accustomed to the invaluable collaboration and support that comes with data team meetings. Whether it concerns my automobile or students’ achievement, I much prefer operating from a preventative stance. I have found it takes much less time, energy, and resources to prevent something from happening than it does to fix something once it has broken.

“*PREVENTION is better than cure.*” –Desiderius Erasmus ■

RTI-Driven Tips to Promote Reading and Writing across the Secondary Curriculum

The RTI model provides an exciting opportunity/incentive for secondary teachers in every discipline to intensify their instruction. This research-based framework encourages teachers to evaluate their classroom instruction and monitor the progress of individual students over time. Although elementary schools have been the primary focus of RTI implementation to this point, secondary schools can benefit from the well articulated and academically-motivated interventions that the model advocates. In fact, seventy percent of middle and high school students require instruction that is targeted to their individual strengths and weaknesses (Alliance for Excellent Education for the Carnegie Corporation of New York).

All students benefit from the implementation of research-based practices with clear objectives. Secondary general education teachers can offer their students the necessary support and interventions that will lead to success and measurable progress. After analyzing more than 100,000 schools with diverse student clientele, William Sanders and colleagues concluded that the teacher is the most important factor in student learning (Sanders and Horn, 1994). Teachers make all the difference!

Differentiated instruction is an integral part of the RTI model. Teachers who rethink the way they approach reading and writing in their classrooms have the potential to reach students on every tier of the RTI triangle.

Reading Instruction

Building literate communities is one of the most important charges given to teachers. Secondary teachers can use pre-, during and post-reading strategies to promote literacy. Teachers might use a variety of texts and supplementary materials to increase the likelihood that all students access the intended content. Professionals can further collect print materials for a class library. These materials should reflect the diverse reading levels in the class.

When students and teachers treat reading as a process, student needs can be assessed on various levels and across time. In turn, student performance in every reading phase can inform instructional choices for a variety of genres (textbooks, nonfiction, fiction, manuals, poetry, drama, the Internet, graphics, and more).

Pre-Reading Strategies:

- Develop a reading profile to assess student interests and readiness to read-determine reading skill levels and gaps
- Use the CLOZE method to evaluate how proficient students are with the reading level of an assignment by:
 - Selecting a passage from the reading.
 - Re-typing the passage by replacing every fifth word with a blank.
 - Invite students to read the passage.
 - Ask students to guess what word belongs in every blank.
 - Give one point for each correct answer.
 - 61% accuracy means the students can read the material independently.
 - 41-60% accuracy, students will need additional instruction.
 - Students scoring below 40% accuracy will read the material with frustration and may need to be grouped with strong readers and/or given alternative tasks.



Reading

When students and teachers treat reading as a process, student needs can be assessed on various levels and across time.

- Offer a variety of reader-response options: advertisements, editorials, cartoons, journals, concept maps, and more.
- Use graphic organizers to help students record ideas in a visual and deliberate way.
- Teach students to use context clues (pictures, surrounding paragraphs/sentences) when they don't understand a passage or word.
- Teach the SQ3R method:
 - **Survey** the material before reading
 - **Question** and write questions about reading materials
 - **Read** and respond through concept maps/graphic organizers
 - **Recall** and relate information to other information from the reading
 - **Review** by discussing content with others, generating a review game, etc.
- Students who have mastered these techniques move on to post reading assignments. Students who have not mastered the pre- and during reading strategies should work with classmates to summarize, re-read, etc. The teacher will re-teach and model information and skills where necessary.
- Students who have not mastered the reading material do homework that will help them improve their reading readiness. They can check their work in groups where mastery-level students reside.
- Generate learning centers or layered curriculum projects wherein those who have excelled create projects that apply the information that they learned in original reading assignments. Other students continue with fundamental skill and reading instruction. The teacher meets with groups of students on every reading level to provide instruction, model effective reading and evaluate student progress.

Post-Reading

- Compare student predictions in pre-reading with actual events/content from the reading sample.
- Give students ample time to orally discuss their conclusions.
- Have students pretend that they are TV Reporters who have three minutes to summarize their findings.
- Ask students to categorize and rank the five main ideas from a given reading assignment in order of importance.
- Students generate a new ending to the story or historical event they read about.
- Organize a debate wherein students take sides on concepts found in their reading.
- Have students develop assessments, study guides and discussion topics for the reading.
- Have students compare their performance on a post-test with their pre-assessment scores.

- Discuss themes and information about the content of the assignment before students read. This can be done through class discussions, related music, mini debates, printed previews, films, and photography.
- Teach students effective skimming strategies.
- Have students write questions and make predictions about reading by skimming subject headings, captions and visuals.
- Have students review visuals to create the story or message that they think will be addressed in the text.
- Have students make connections between prior knowledge and newly read material.
- Have students complete an anticipation guide where they mark an opinion about content from the reading and compare their opinions with the author's insights.
- Teach essential vocabulary that students will see in the reading assignment. Have students make a vocabulary collage for each word. The collage is divided into four sections: the upper left corner contains the vocabulary word, beneath that the definition; the upper right corner has an antonym or use of the word in a sentence, and the box below it displays a picture that the student associates with the word.

During-Reading Techniques:

- Use double-entry notes: the left column includes summarized content from the reading material; the right column includes questions, reactions, and connections to prior knowledge.
- Have students generate a visual collage or photo essay/video to illustrate what they learned.

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Writing Across the Curriculum

When teaching science, math, social studies, language arts and other academic specialties, secondary teachers can use the writing process to improve student learning of subject matter and subject-specific literacy strategies. The demands for literacy increase as students progress from elementary to secondary school (Cole, 1990; Resnick, 1987). Teachers can meet these demands through whole-class activities, small-group activities, individualized activities and student-teacher conferences. In turn, the RTI emphasis on meeting the diverse needs of students in every classroom can be implemented on every level of writing instruction. When teachers use well-designed writing assignments, students think about content in more sophisticated ways.

Whole-Class Activities

- Use writing surveys to determine student readiness and interest in specific writing tasks.
- Teach students to prepare before they write. They should consider the task, audience and purpose of given assignments.
- Allow students time to pre-write their ideas for a prompt. Do not emphasize spelling or punctuation. Encourage students to put their ideas on paper in a free-flow format for ten to fifteen minutes. Use student pre-writes to determine on what tier of Bloom's Taxonomy students think and write (for this assignment). It may be helpful to get a second opinion from a colleague.
- Model and provide examples of the writing you want them to use (ads, autobiographies, directions, contracts, lab reports, resumes, etc.).
- Discuss writer's block and strategies that can remedy the "getting started blues."
- Provide mini lessons on the writing skills that you would like to see. For example, you might have a mini lesson on writing a provocative thesis.
- Offer a reading, visualization or listening lesson to build background knowledge for writing tasks. Students must know the content about which you expect them to write.
- Teach research and note taking skills.
- Show students how to categorize information.
- Writing is difficult. Offer students several small writing assignments rather than a few long tasks.
- Always ask students to include a list of sources from which they drew information to complete the project.
- Find ways to publish student work: on the bulletin boards, in the school paper, portfolios, teen magazines, and more!
- At the end of a semester or school year, give students the prompt that they started the year with. Compare their progress over time.

Small-Group Activities

- Write with your students. They need to see you as an author and risk taker-include your writing in peer evaluations.
- Before students compose, have them "talk-write" with a partner: one student talks about her ideas while the other serves as a scribe.
- Develop peer conferencing and feedback teams. Have specific assessment guides and questions for students to use as they evaluate and respond to their peers' work.
- Many pre-writing activities should take place in small-group settings. This allows greater participation from every student. You can encourage: brainstorming, charting, outlining, drawing, webbing, role-playing, and researching.

Individualized Activities

- Ask students to conduct self-evaluations on their writing.
- Have students generate and frequently review writing goals.
- At the beginning of a lesson, tell students the content objective or question about which they will write at the end of the lesson. Their written response will be their "ticket out the door." Have their "exit tickets" on a classmate's desk the next class period. Ask students to have a two-minute discussion with the person whose ticket they possess as well as the person who had their ticket.
- Encourage students to write several drafts before their work is graded by a rubric.



Student-Teacher Conferences

- Host short interviews with students wherein you address their questions and progress. Focus on the skill that you want developed in a given assignment: grammar, clarity, audience, persuasiveness and so forth.
- Develop learning contracts wherein students create writing goals and appropriate writing tasks/revisions based on their skill level.

At the end of the day, all students need a teacher's enthusiasm, expertise and leadership. However, the instruction students need from you varies from learner to learner. Unless we recognize and cater to the differences in classrooms, many learners get lost in the shuffle. The true professional embraces students on every tier of the RTI triangle. Powerful learning and instruction in the areas of reading and writing can bridge some of the gaps in student ability and access to content. Secondary teachers in every discipline can use reading and writing strategies to promote the academic progress of all students. Your charge is to build life-long skills for students across the academic and aptitude spectrum; "Secondary teachers unite!" ■

RTI Resources...

The following are resources to help you in your quest for more knowledge about RTI. This list is not exhaustive as there are many resources available; these are just some of our favorites!

★ On the Web

NASDSE RTI Project Page
<http://www.nasdse.org/projects.cfm?pageprojectid=23>

NRCLD RTI Symposium
<http://www.nrclد.org/symposium2003/index.html>

California-RtI Webcasts
<http://www4.scoe.net/rti/programs.cfm?menueChoice=3>

National Association of School Psychologists
www.nasponline.org

National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
www.pbis.org

Utah's Behavior Initiatives
www.updc.org/ubi

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring
www.studentprogress.org

Intervention Central
www.interventioncentral.org

Center on Instruction
www.centeroninstruction.org

Florida Center for Reading Research
www.fcrr.org

Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts
www.texasreading.org.utcrcla

What Works Clearinghouse
www.whatworks.ed.gov

Books

Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation

Batsche, G., Elliott, J., Graden, J. L., Grimes, J., Kovaleski, J. F., Reschly, D. J., Schrag, J., & Tilly, W. D. (2005).
Available: www.nasdse.org

Response to Intervention: Principles and Strategies for Effective Practice

Brown-Chidsey, R., & Steege, M. W. (2005).
Available: www.guilford.com

Handbook of Response to Intervention

Jimerson, S.R., Burns, M.K. & VanDerHeyden, A.M. (Eds.). (2007).
Available: www.springer.com

Evidence-Based Reading Practices for Response to Intervention

Haager, D., Klinger, J., & Vaughn, S. (2007).
www.brookspublishing.com

The ABCs of CBM: A Practical Guide to Curriculum Based Measurement

Hosp, M., Hosp, J., & Howell, K. W. (2006).
www.guilford.com

Curriculum Based Evaluation: Teaching and Decision Making

Howell, K.W., & Nolet, V. (1999).
www.amazon.com



How to Talk

Teacher leaders encourage professional growth by engaging colleagues in positive conversations about their teaching practices.

As the first line of support for classroom and school improvement efforts, schools-based instructional specialists face a variety of challenges, among them the need to engage their peers in purposeful conversations about learners and learning. Their manner of talking can determine whether they're seen as well-meaning colleagues who dispense advice or teacher leaders who ignite learning.

Consider the following scenario. As part of their school's initiative on improving student writing, Susan, a literacy specialist, visits the 3rd grade classroom of her colleague, Barbara. Susan invites Barbara to share some writing samples that illustrate her student's progress. The teachers sit side by side, with their chosen work samples and grade-level writing standards focusing the conversation.

Susan begins from a *coaching* stance. "As you examine these pieces of writing," she asks, "what are some of the things you notice?"

Barbara points at one of the work samples and remarks, "This student really stands out because he demonstrates a rich use of vocabulary. He's clearly at a level 14 on the rubric in vocabulary and usage."

After the two teachers briefly discuss what might be producing success for this student and how he compares with others in the class, Susan asks, "What percentage of your students operate at this level?"

Here, Barbara expresses concern that although this student and others are doing well, about 40 percent of the students are scoring 2s and 3s on the seam measurement. She laments, "I'm using the recommended strategies. I just don't know what else to do."

Sensing Barbara's frustration, Susan shifts to a more consultative stance. Rather than prescribing solutions, she suggests potential causes:

"A few things might contribute to the different performance levels. Some of your students may need a more scaffolded approach to writing; they may need to isolate parts of speech and build word banks. Some students might be inhibited by spelling limitations. If that's the case, they might benefit initially from partnering with stronger writers to compose together. Or, because reading and writing are so tightly linked, the solution might lie in targeted reading instruction that highlights vocabulary and word usage. On the basis of what you know about your class, which of these seem most likely?"

Considering the possibilities, Barbara thinks that additional scaffolding has the greatest potential for promoting student growth. However, she's not sure how to begin.

So Teachers Will Listen

Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman

In response, Susan takes a collaborative approach to considering next steps. She invites Barbara to select a work sample from the lower-performing student and suggests,

"Let's examine the word choices this student is making and list the verbs she uses. We can use the list to create instructional exercises. Why don't you start by naming some of the verbs you have concerns about?"

After another 15 minutes, the conversation closes, with Barbara suggesting several strategies she intends to use and describing how she will monitor their effectiveness. They agree to meet in two weeks to discuss the results of her efforts.

Effective learning-focused conversations like this one include three vital elements: a psychologically safe environment; a clear focus; and a differentiated approach in which the specialist alternately coaches, collaborates, and consults, depending on the colleague's responses.

Making It Safe

Teachers can perceive the work of school improvement as corrective, particularly experienced teachers who are passionate about their present ways of operating. To be successful, teacher leaders must stimulate the exploration of instructional practice, increase receptivity to new ideas, and help forge connections between present practice and new initiatives. This productive professional talk requires a psychologically safe environment to open both the physical and the metaphorical doors that can serve as barriers between instructional specialist and their colleagues.

Specialists must use several skills in concert that invite and sustain collaborative thinking. These include fully attending to the conversation physically, emotionally, and cognitively by leaning in, making eye contact, and offering other nonverbal acknowledgements; listening to understand the other's perspective, and purposefully choosing exploratory language and a cordial intonation.

Establishing a Clear Focus

Skillful facilitation of learning focused conversations involved the thoughtful analysis of multiple sources of data that relate to agreed-on standards of practice. These data emerge from the processes and products of student learning and include such items as student work samples, assessment results, classroom observations, lesson plans, and classroom artifacts. Teachers can use the data to compare students and groups of students within a classroom, grade level, school, and school district. Keeping the standards for teaching and learning as a central focus helps teachers address achievement gaps and promotes greater understanding about what is working, who is learning, and what teachers might do to improve instructional practice.

To create greater psychological safety for both novice and veteran teachers, skillful instructional specialists use data and standards as a "third point"

(Grinder, 1997). They focus conversations not on the teacher's teaching practices, but on the factors producing positive results as well as performance gaps. The third point puts the information safely off to the side for specialist and colleague to examine and explore together.

Differentiating Support

To maximize the effectiveness of exchanges in both one-to-one and group conversations, skillful instructional specialist differentiate their approach by practicing the three stances Susan used in the opening scenario: coaching, collaborating, and consulting. Their choice of stance depends on the teacher's degree of knowledge and experience, his or her emotional and cognitive readiness, and whether the issue in question involves an immediate need or a long-term outcome. Skillful specialists navigate along a continuum, shifting as needed among stances, to develop teachers' capacities to use data to inform their practice, make increasingly effective choices, and engage in standards-driven self-assessment.

The aim is to develop teachers' collective efficacy, support self-directed learning, and enhance capacities for engaging in ongoing, professionally rich, collegial relationships (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000). Two key attributes define each stance: who is providing the bulk of the information and who is problem solving.

Coaching

In the coaching stance, the teacher is the primary source of information and analysis. The instructional specialist paraphrases and inquires to increase awareness, broaden perspectives, and clarify issues. The Cognitive Coaching Model (Costa & Garmston, 2002) defines this stance as mediating the underlying thinking that drives the observable behaviors of teaching. This skillful exchange supports a teachers' awareness; idea production; and the collaborative productivity. Using inclusive pronouns, such as us, our, and we, enhances the invitation to the teacher to contribute ideas. For example, in the opening scenario, once Barbara and Susan identified possible causes for gaps in student performance, they worked together to generate potential strategies for designing next steps.

The collaborative stance signals respect and the expectation of a collegial relationship. However, instructional specialists must carefully monitor their actions in this stance—they need to resist the impulse to jump in. Being overly enthusiastic about an approach or being adamant about the "right" way to do something may override the intention to cocreate ideas and possibilities. In this case, collaboration can degenerate into dispensing advice.

Consulting

In the consulting stance, the instructional specialist supplies information, identifies and analyzes gaps, suggests solution, thinks aloud about cause-and-effect relationships, and makes connections to principles of practice. Skillful learning-focused consultation provides essential information about learning

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and learners, curriculum and content, policies, stands, and effective practices in ways that are immediately useful and build capacity over time. Learning-focused leaders make their thinking transparent, enabling colleagues to access their experience as a lens for problem solving. As teachers internalize principles of learning and teaching, these expert lenses become mental resources for the teachers to independently generate solutions. In our scenario, Susan shifted to learning-focused consultative stance with Barbara by offering three possible causes for students' low performance in writing.

If overused, the consultant stance can build dependency rather than capacity. Providing advice without explaining the underlying rationale curtails a colleague's ability to transfer new learning to personal contexts or generate solutions independently. Therefore, it is important to distinguish learning-focused consultation from simply "fixing" things or telling teachers what to do. Specialists may observe pressing needs in classrooms and want to quickly provide information to help the teacher. However, they may miss context-rich learning opportunities if they limit their consulting repertoire to telling (see "Eight Strategies for Learning-Focused Consulting," p. 32).

Sustaining the Conversation

High-performance teacher leaders have the ability to focus attention and resources where they make the greatest difference (Leithwood, Louis, Anders, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Using sophisticated data is an important part of this equation (Reeves, 2002). However, all the data analysis skills in the world have little effect if teacher leaders are unable to frame productive conversations about that data with teachers (Wellman & Lipton, 2004). What teacher leaders talk about with their colleagues matters. But how they talk—so teachers listen—can matter even more.

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Eight Strategies for Learning-Focused Consulting

- 1. Offer a Menu of Choices.** If one idea is useful, several are even more effective. Suggest at least three options when planning or problem solving. This provides information and support while leaving the decision making—and the responsibility—with your colleague.
- 2. Think Aloud.** Just as in instructional problem solving or strategic reading, sharing your thought processes with your colleague, along with a solution or idea, enhances learning and maximized the likelihood of their transferring this knowledge to future applications.
- 3. Share the What, Why, and How.** When sharing expertise, describe the what, why, and how of an idea or suggestion. This might sound like, "Here is a strategy for addressing that issue (what), which is likely to be effective because (why), and this is how you might apply it (how)."
- 4. State a Principle of Practice.** Connect a specific strategy or solution to the broader principles of effective practice to give colleagues the opportunity to learn and apply the principle in other situations. This might sound like, "An important principle of practice related to (topic) is _____, so a strategy like (suggestion) should be effective in this situation."
- 5. Generate Categories.** Addressing ideas or solutions as categories provides a wider range of choice and a richer opportunity for learning than addressing discrete strategies or applications. For example, a category such as "grouping students" is broader and richer than "putting students in pairs" or a specific partnering strategy.
- 6. Name Casual Factors.** Rather than suggesting potential solutions, offer several factors that might be causing the problem. This option is particularly advisable when working with experienced teachers. This might sound like, "There are several things that might typically produce that behavior (or result); for example, _____, _____, or _____. Given what you know about your situation, what's your hunch about which of these, if any, might be a factor?"
- 7. Consider an Alternative Point of View.** When idea generation bogs down, sharing additional points of view can reenergize the conversation. For example, offer thoughts on how parents, administrators, or students might consider the issue.
- 8. Reframe the Problem or Issue.** Expert problem solvers spend more time defining a problem than strategizing solution. Novel approaches to defining a problem not only release new energy and ideas, but often lead to more effective solutions. Reframing the problem could mean including positive or useful aspects of the issue or alternative descriptions of the goal or approach to the problem. This might sound like, "Although 60 percent of your students are not meeting the standard, 40 percent are. Let's examine what's producing their success."

Source: Mentoring Matters: A Practical Guide to Learning, by L.Lipton and B. Wellman, 2002, Sherman, CT: MiraVia. Adapted with permission. ■

Systems Change through Coaching

Being an educator is a challenging endeavor because what looks simple and straight-forward is often complex and difficult. The public places high demands on the school system, and rightly so, because educators cultivate our most valued national treasure, children. Schools are complex systems and this fact makes being an educator challenging and rewarding.

One of the most rewarding activities that I am honored to engage in as an educator is development of Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) systems through Utah's Behavioral Initiative (UBI). Schools and districts across the state of Utah are taking on the challenge of systems change for behavioral support and reaping the rewards of increased student and staff commitment to educational outcomes. According to the Center for PBIS (www.pbis.org) the objective of PBIS is systems change to "redesign and support teaching and learning environments that are effective, efficient, relevant and durable." Effective implementation of systems change in schools requires that the people within the system (i.e. school) both understand the actions necessary for change and see the value of those actions being greater than the cost of effort. According to Scott (2006):

"Systems change in the school certainly would be easier if PB[IS] could be implemented in accordance with a one-size-fits all, cookbook approach. However, because PB[IS] is not a curriculum but a framework for organization in accordance with unique features of individual systems the cookbook approach will not be realistic."

When undergoing systems change schools must agree on outcomes that are meaningful to the community, assess their own needs through the use of valid information and data, select logical practices and interventions to support student behavior, and develop infrastructure (system supports) to support and maintain staff behavior and ensure a high degree of fidelity with implementing.

Since effective implementation of systems change for behavioral support cannot be implemented and maintained using a cookbook approach, the UBI training platform has adopted a coaching model. Each UBI partner district has identified district coach(es) to support school-based teams. The coach works to assist schools as they collect data, determine interventions needed, support staff behavior, and adjust for efficiency as needed. Through practice and hard work, the UBI coaches have learned much about systems support and coaching for implementation in schools. The following includes frequently asked questions about coaching and systems change in schools.



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Coaching

What is the intent of coaching in the educational system?

Response by, Allan Whitmore, School Counselor, Wasatch County School District

"The test of a good coach is that when they leave, others will carry on successfully." — Author Unknown

I appreciate the above coaching quote because its central theme is: you as the pupil are smart enough to learn and improve upon the ideas of effective coaches long after they have moved on. Coaching intends to build and nurture the skills and abilities of educational professionals as they serve children and families.

What does it require to be an educational coach?

Response by, Vernon Hatch, School Psychologist, San Juan District

It requires knowledge of content (i.e. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) best practices; knowledge of the individual school climate and personnel; knowledge of how to collect data to determine strengths and needs of a school; and knowledge of how to effectively communicate with others.

Response by, Lori Spell, Special Education Teacher, Weber County School District

Coaching can definitely require a lot of background knowledge on the subject being coached as well as knowledge on skills such as leadership, mentoring, active listening, and interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. You can never be too prepared as a coach since every individual and/or team you work with is unique and has different needs. The most important lesson that I have learned as a coach, is to take the time to get to know the person and or a team because the relationship you build with them will have a profound effect on the outcome of your coaching.

Response by, Kirk L. Dodson, School Psychologist, Davis County School District

I cannot hear the words 'coach' or 'coaching' without a nostalgic, albeit somewhat trauma inducing, trip into the past: A skinny fourteen year old

being yelled at by a man he both adores and hates. Coach John Doe was trying to motivate me, yet only had one method.

Coaching for systems change (i.e. UBI) does not allow for a singular approach. In fact, it may not even be coaching in the traditionally understood sense; it is not motivating individuals to perform through direct contact. Coaching with UBI involves taking a systems approach and having flexibility in both roles performed and methods used. It involves finessing collaborative efforts between the state, district, and school levels and meeting everyone where they are at in an effort to progress forward.

In short, coaching with UBI is attempting to create a positive atmosphere for change within differing environments with the main focus being on motivating individuals to help move the system forward all the while being sure the individuals involved are themselves supported. Individuals who, in turn, spread their enthusiasm becoming, in many ways, another coach at another level; thereby, strengthening and furthering effective systems change (ripple and trickle effect).

How do you keep coaching from being evaluative?

Response by, Mishele Carroll, School Psychologist, Granite School District

To be an effective, *non-evaluative coach*, I try to make sure to clarify my role as coach from the outset of the coaching relationship. Communication and active listening skills are key elements of coaching which promote understanding and trust. The better I communicate my role with the professionals I coach, the less threatened they feel and the more open to feedback they become. I try to think through ahead of time how my feedback may be perceived and of the kinds of resources I can provide in order to promote opportunities for learning and growth. I also like to ask leading questions which provoke thought and allow for creative problem solving instead of simply giving answers. Seeking out the professionals I coach and assessing their needs instead of waiting for them to come to me, lets them know that I'm a resource for them and not a judge of their skills. Perhaps the best part of being a non-evaluative coach is the learning and laughing we do together.

What does UBI systems coaching look like in your district?

Response by, April Reynolds and Kathy Tatum, Educational Specialists, Salt Lake City School District

Salt Lake District began participation in the UBI training platform in 2006. As a relatively new participant, our coaching roles are still evolving.

Currently we have schools at multiple levels of implementation—2 implementing and 5 collecting baseline data and building consensus with the goal of implementation being the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year. We have organized our time by dedicating a 1/2 day each week to plan with each other, and having set meeting times with each school currently active in the training platform to provide coaching and consultation support. We meet with the two schools implementing the model twice monthly, and also meet with the building coordinators once monthly.

Our time with the school teams is generally spent in:

- Providing support to the team in areas of targeted need
- Providing training to the team members on PBIS practices
- Modeling implementation of PBIS practices
- Gathering resources
- Provide feedback and support to the building coordinator
- Acting as a sounding board to the team as they generate ideas
- Asking leading questions to facilitate problem solving
- Answering questions regarding structure and implementation, data gathering and the decision-making process that goes with using data to guide practice.
- Working as a liaison between the state team, the district team, and the schools

Our district supports our coaching time by giving us release time to attend conferences, and scheduled training for our coaching roles. Subs are provided for teams so they can be available for coaching time, and training time.

What are common challenges for coaches and possible solutions?

Heidi Mathie, School Psychologist and Grant Coordinator, UBI Links Grant

Some of the barriers I encountered as a coach were time management, treatment (intervention) integrity, determining level of support needed and flexibility (i.e., each school moving at their own pace). Having strong support at multiple levels, district and state was one way to overcome barriers. It was suggested by the state team that for support of four schools it would take about 1 day per week. My district supervisor followed this model by freeing up my time and allowing me to more effectively manage my time.

Another barrier was determining the level of support to give the teams and helping them implement the interventions with integrity. When I took the time to visit the schools and be a part of their team meetings, I was able to get a better understanding of their needs and the level of fidelity of implementation. The last barrier I listed was flexibility. In the beginning it was difficult to manage numerous schools that were all moving at a different pace. Some schools needed additional training on universal supports and some were ready to move to supplemental or secondary supports.

As a coach I had to learn to be more flexible and work with the teams at the pace that they set. In a few cases, I had to help them slow down to help ensure systematic change was occurring at a rate of sustainability. It seems appropriate if the school team is not following through with their school agreement, making progress on their action plan and their School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) scores indicate poor level of implementation, it may be in best interest of coach to re-assess the commitment level of the school. This assessment process would include a discussion with the state team, the district team, the building coordinator and the building administrator to

determine whether the school needed additional support and training, or if they needed to agree to part ways. If a school had a desire to continue to be part of the initiative I would be willing to work with them as long as they could show progress.

The coaching network provided by the state team also facilitated great collaboration among the coaches. When I did encounter barriers, I could always get feedback and ideas from coaches in other districts.

How has coaching changed professional development in your district?

Response by, Candace Cartwright Dee, School Psychologist, Jordan School District

Coaching has impacted professional development in Jordan School District in two very noticeable ways. First, the focus of professional development has begun to shift from remediation to prevention. Previously, training focused on teaching teachers how to help students with academic and behavioral deficits. It also focused on helping teachers improve their skills and alleviate their deficits. With the introduction of coaching, particularly as it relates to Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), the focus of professional development has centered more on interventions that prevent problems rather than addressing the problem after the fact. Training now addresses all students, not just those needing remediation, and is geared towards teaching students how to be successful participants in a school community.

The second noticeable change in professional development has been the inclusion of training special educators with regular educators and school administrators. Previously, training was conducted separately for all groups and had different areas of focus. With the introduction of coaching, efforts have been made to bring all parties to the table to talk about what is appropriate for all students. The value of this collaboration goes way beyond everyone hearing the same information and being on the same page. It has helped with the acceptance of all students, even those with disabilities, as important people in the school environment.

Coaching opens up a professional relationship between the coach and the school or classroom involved in the coaching process. The strength of this relationship allows the participants to pinpoint and discuss problem areas, strengths, and realistic future goals in an atmosphere of camaraderie and support. Professional development then becomes a positive, individualized, problem solving process for all involved.

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*Response by, Liesl Finlinson, School Psychologist,
Millard County School District*

In Millard School District, coaching has been infused into all personnel development activities and goals. Coaching has been implemented through the general education departments. Teachers were selected from each school to become coaching trainers for the other teachers in their school. A “training of trainers” is sponsored quarterly by the district and the UPDC. Currently, coaching is done on a voluntary basis. Teachers are not required to spend any particular amount of time but are encouraged to try various aspects of coaching as they have been trained by the trainers. Coaches are to schedule times to go to into the class of the teacher they are coaching and then to give them guidance (not evaluation).

How do you stay positive while coaching?

*Response by, Jonathan Stewart, School Psychologist,
Tooele County School District*

Seriously, there are challenging moments as with any endeavor, but there are so many more rewarding experiences which carry through the challenging times. Just as with teaching, those moments when a student gets a concept or the proverbial light bulb goes on, those same moments occur in coaching and keep things fresh and exciting. Moments like hearing about a neighbor kid getting a school “Caught being good” ticket, seeing the year-end celebration which brought the whole school community together under the UBI umbrella, or sitting in a team meeting and hearing about future plans beyond what you had even imagined. Remembering those moments or envisioning those future moments keeps you going. Being able to see the end from the beginning is also very helpful. Sometimes schools and individuals get “stuck,” but knowing the fun part is helping to overcome the obstacles to get those you work with at that end goal. And when all else fails, relying on the support network created for coaches helps reenergize and get the spark back.

How do you know if your coaching is effective and worth the effort?

*Response by, Jeri Sagers, Behavior Specialist,
Tooele County School District*

I know my coaching has been effective when a team or an individual respects my expertise enough to request my help or guidance. Coaching is effective when rapport is established between the coach and team members so a comfortable exchange can take place. I feel coaching has been successful when the team has followed the guidelines, suggestions, and assistance that was offered. I like to know that my efforts are helping the team make progress. I listen, help with data, and encourage teams. I have learned that you can assess the team’s progress and make coaching decisions by listening without being judgmental or threatening to the people involved. Guiding the teams and helping them make sense of their data is an important piece of the puzzle when trying to evaluate if they are ready for the next step. Also, an important tool that I have found imperative is encouragement. This helps them to feel comfortable and confident in what they are trying to implement. When educational professionals can take ownership for their work, they are then ready to move forward. It is like watching a child learn to walk or ride a bike; when they finally achieve independence, they are capable of taking off on their own. There is nothing more rewarding than watching teams grow, learn and really make a difference in their schools.

Response by, Angie Loosli, Behavior Specialist, Logan City School District

Coaching is fun. I’ve enjoyed watching the school climate in my UBI schools change. I’ve seen such a difference in how staff involved with UBI respond to challenging student behavior. When staff begin looking objectively at behavior data and choosing practices to implement as an entire school team, they tend to be less defensive and more willing to work on the problem. I think both faculty and students feel supported and more successful.



If you had a coach, what would you want them to do?

*Response by, Allan Whitmore, School Counselor,
Wasatch County School District*

Here is what I would want in a coach:

I would want a coach who is knowledgeable, skillful and passionate about their craft. I would want a coach who is approachable, and able to make me feel as if I am a vital part of the organization. I would want a coach who is a good listener, and able to point out the parts of my message that I am not hearing. One who can present a different angle on what I am struggling with. I would want a coach who is able to think quickly and act in an efficient manner. I would want a coach who is quick to give genuine positives for praiseworthy effort and outcomes. I would want a coach who is not afraid to give constructive criticism on how I can improve. It is an extra bonus if I can walk away with a smile on my face. I would want a coach who can provide corrective feedback in a kind and gentle, yet firm manner. I would want a coach who is able to communicate their vision in a precise and simple manner. I would want a coach with a good sense of humor and generous measure of empathy. I would want a coach who treats all members of the team fairly, equitably and with respect. In the final analysis of coaching, I would appreciate a friend who is capable of assisting me in my quest to be the best I can be!!

This is what type of coach I hope to be to others in my district! ■

In the September 2007 issue of *The Special Educator* we introduced this series with an overview of state demographics indicating the increased number of culturally and linguistically diverse students in our schools and communities. For example, since 2000, seven of every 10 new students in Utah were culturally and linguistically diverse. Latinos now make up 10.6% of the population ranking Utah as 12th in the nation in the percentage of the population that is Latino (Christian, 2006).

Changing demographics have particularly challenged the field of special education. Given this great influx of immigrants, teachers and other school personnel need to be prepared to provide appropriate services to these students and their families.

Previously we outlined some facts related to the following areas: Language and Cultural Differences, Differences vs. Disorders, Teaching English Language Learners (ELL), and Teaching Culturally Diverse Students. In this article we review the facts and provide elaboration on the first area, Language and Cultural Differences.

Language and culture are assets and resources rather than deficits. Since many immigrant families who come to the United States are from the lowest rungs of the economic ladder, we often assume that it is language and culture which result in low performance in school. We forget that there are people who do not speak English who are well educated and there are people who speak English who are not. The fact is, however, that having two languages and being able to function in two cultures has consistently been shown to result in cognitive advantages for learners. (See Cummins, 2000, for a review of this research.) Even the least advantaged of students who come to the United States bring with them a wealth and richness of language and culture upon which the schools should build. Who would not like to achieve native competence in more than one language or be able to function in more than one culture?

A review of research by the National Literacy Panel on Language-minority Children and Youth shows that literacy skill in the native language impacts literacy acquisition in the second language at virtually every level from word recognition to reading comprehension (Dressler & Kamil, 2006). A substantial body of research also suggests that the development of high levels of literacy skill in two or more language actually results in certain cognitive and linguistic advantages over those who do not have these skills (Cummins & Schecter, 2003). There are at least three major implications of this research for the special education practitioner. First, learners should be

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Language and Cultural Differences: Meeting the Needs of Diverse Students



encouraged to continue the development of their native language skills, even if the school is unable to provide instruction in that language. Parents should be encouraged to read to their children and help them develop critical thinking and literacy skills in their native language. The more children learn about the world and about literacy in particular in their native language, the greater advantage they will have in learning content and literacy skills in the second language. As we encourage parents to read to their children, in many instances we will need to provide them with information about where to find access to books and we may even need to set up family literacy programs to improve parents' reading skills. Second, since skills developed in the native language influence learners' abilities to learn in a second language, performance in the native language should be a significant part of their assessment where possible. Having this first language assessment will help to distinguish learning problems from linguistic ones. Third, being aware of learners' skills in the native language can be helpful in formulating an appropriate and successful educational plan for them.

Diverse learners are not blank slates. They enter school having a rich history of culture and first language. They do not leave their first language and culture behind when they enter the school doors.

Dominant language and language proficiency mean two different things. Students may have a dominant language other than English (e.g., Spanish, Chinese), but this does not imply that they have academic proficiency in that language. Students who are most at risk in our schools are either children who come to our schools at upper grades without academic language development and literacy in their native language or who enter at kindergarten or first grade and receive inappropriate instruction.

Often when these at risk youngsters show lack of academic progress in the English environment, it is interpreted as a sign of learning deficits and they are seen as candidates for special education rather than as needing appropriate instruction in the mainstream classroom. This has major implications for the field of special education in that the issue here is academic language development, not learning disabilities. Appropriate instruction would include scaffolding that moves the learner from a functional social use of language to an academic use of language with a major emphasis on developing literacy skills.

Diverse learners are not blank slates. They enter school having a rich history of culture and first language. They do not leave their first language and culture behind when they enter the school doors. English language learners enter our schools with a wide range of language proficiencies in English, in their first language, and in subject-matter knowledge. Some have been highly successful in academic achievement in their native countries. Others enter Utah schools with limited formal schooling. One study found that 20% of high school ELLs and 12% of middle-school ELLs missed 2 or more years of schooling prior to entering U.S. schools (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

All learners bring with them a language, a culture, and a history that differ in their degrees of congruence with the English system they are expected to acquire. What they learned and how they were taught could be very different from that of a child in the U. S., but that does not imply that their system is deficient. To the degree that their language shares the Roman alphabet and is closely related to English, as is the case with Romance and Germanic languages, the transition to English literacy will be easier and the amount of positive transfer will be greater. To the degree

that their language is more distant historically from English and their writing system is less like that of English, for example Japanese and Chinese, greater will be the challenges in transitioning to English literacy (Dressler & Kamil, 2006) and in developing the vast amount of vocabulary required to function in an academic context (Hatch & Brown, 1995).

Likewise the more congruent learners' home culture is to American culture, the easier learning to function in the two cultures will be (Schuman, 1986). While culture affects almost every aspect of a person's life, there are certain areas of culture which should be of greater concern to special educators and teachers. There are, for example, many facets of culture which have to do with role expectations and interpersonal communication. If educators are not sensitive to these differences and are not respectful of the fact that the learner's way of behaving is as "correct" as that of the teacher, not only will communication break down but the learner may get the sense that his/her system is bad or inadequate. For example, in many cultures, it is impolite for children to meet the gaze

of an adult when the adult is giving them instructions or corrections. In American culture averting one's eyes while being talked to may be interpreted as disrespect or guilt or evasiveness. Learners may be shocked to have teachers chastise them for behaving in ways in which they have been taught to show respect.

A second aspect of culture which is critical to a successful academic experience is that of social structure and role expectations. In particular, the nature of the school experience varies greatly across cultures. How the system works and what the expectations of the school are in terms of roles and requirements can be very mystifying to an immigrant learner and his or her parents. It is incumbent upon educators to pay special attention to orienting immigrant learners and their parents regarding the proper roles of teachers, students and parents in the schooling of children, including the expectations of the school with regards to grades, homework, classroom behavior, and so forth.

One of the nice things about developing a healthy respect for other cultures is that it is relative easy for teachers to achieve. When teachers see learners behaving in ways that are unlike the culture in which the teacher grew up, they can ask themselves if the behavior may have its roots in culture and they may temporarily suspend judgment until they have a chance to ask a parent or someone from that culture about the behavior. Also there are many sources of information about world cultures that can help educators to become familiar with the cultures of their students. One such source is the Culturegrams, originally developed at Brigham Young University for use by missionaries, but which are now available commercially <www.culturegrams.com>. This source provides a four to five page summary of salient cultural facts about some 200 different cultures. Also, the Center for Applied Linguistics, which can be accessed on-line <www.cal.org>, publishes information about many less prominent immigrant cultures in the United States.

This series will be continued in the March 2008 issue of this journal.

References available upon request from the Utah Personnel Development Center ■

Fact, Fiction, or Questions about what “Research Based” Means in Autism Interventions Good Marketing?

**Cathy Longstroth, Program Specialist,
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Did you notice how in the days of low fat diets, the manufacturers of nutritionally empty snack foods started labeling their products “fat free?” And did you notice in the hey day of the Atkins diet, many high cholesterol foods were marketed as “low carb?” Now with the emphasis on scientifically sound interventions that are part of the Response to Intervention (RTI) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era we are seeing “research based” just about as frequently. Occasionally there is also the implication that the methodology being put forth is the only one that really has the backing of rigorous scientific study. Changes will be coming in the future, but at this time no clear evidence exists to support the conclusion that one approach is totally superior to another or the exclusive way to instruct children on the autism spectrum.

Two often cited comparisons of various interventions are:

1. National Research Council (2001) (NRC) Educating Children with Autism. Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism. Catherine Lord and James P. McGee, eds, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. The full report is available online at <http://www.nap.edu>.

2. *Effective Educational Practices for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Rose Iovannone, Glen Dunlap, Heather Huber, and Don Kincaid, Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disorders; Fall 2003; 18, 3, Pro Quest Journals. The full report is available online at <http://depts.washington.edu/pdacent/publications.html>

The comprehensive 229-page NAP report delineates the major reasons for the less than conclusive results obtained from the studies they reviewed. It is an enormous procedural and ethical challenge to design sound autism research. Some of the issues are:

1. The generally small number of participants in individual studies.
2. The absence of equally matched control groups. To quote Stephen Shore, “If you met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.” Even matching on the basis of IQ, autism severity checklists, or adaptive behavior assessments will not ensure that the students in two study groups are really similar.
3. Consistent and meaningful outcome measures. There is not consensus in establishing the most salient outcome measures. Some studies use improvement in IQ scores, improved scores on autism checklists, or ability to be educated in a regular classroom setting. The classroom setting is especially problematic as it depends heavily on extraneous variables such as the school’s inclusion philosophy or the skills of the classroom teacher.
4. The problem of limiting the treatment to one variable. Because there is an ethical dilemma in forgoing additional advantageous interventions, it is difficult to tell if the treatment studied is responsible for the improvement.
5. The inability of studies to rule out the effects of normal development or maturity on the treatment outcomes.
6. The failure of research to determine the subclasses of students on the spectrum for whom the intervention works and those for whom it does not work.
7. The research on most comprehensive programs has been implemented and analyzed by their creators. This may result in experimenter bias.

The NAP’s summary of the research is, “Although a number of comprehensive programs have provided data on their effectiveness, and, in some cases, claims have been made that certain treatments are superior to others, there have been virtually no comparisons of different interventions of equal intensity.”

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Autism Interventions

So what is a teacher to do? Throw in the towel and ship the student off for Dolphin therapy?

Perish the Thought! Let's suggest two "scientifically sound" ideas:

1. Treat the student as a research subject of one. Ask meaningful questions of parents and caregivers and listen closely. Keep careful and easily accessible records of what works and what doesn't work for that particular child. Often the strategy a teacher found successful in one grade is lost in later grades, etc. To prevent this, document

- a. Effective reinforcers
- b. Behavioral "triggers"
- c. Sensory sensitivity information
- d. Educational interventions used and their level of success
- e. Behavioral interventions used and their level of success
- f. Supportive strategies—as visual schedules or organizational aides.
- g. Social skills taught—especially those that may need to be reviewed.
- h. Relaxation and coping strategies.
- i. Any other relevant information that would assist teachers in the coming years to be more effective.

2. While no comprehensive programs were found to be inherently superior, researchers have identified essential **components** of major programs that have empirical support and should be included in programming for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. (Iovannone, et. al. 2003). These are:

- a. Supportive and structured learning environments
- b. Family involvement
- c. Early intervention
- d. Specialized curricula focusing on communication and social interaction
- e. Predictability and routine
- f. Functional approach to problem behaviors
- g. Planned transitions
- h. Individualization of supports and services
- i. Systematic, carefully planned instruction
- j. Intensity of engagement
- k. Development of appropriate practices.

The Effective Educational Practices for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders article (Iovanne, et. al. 2003), lists these components, their descriptions, the corresponding research studies, and examples of interventions that contain these components. For example, "Specialized Curricula: Communication" contains "multiple exemplar discrete trial, PECS, Social Stories, pictorial cues, and written social phrases" among others.

We can expect advances in research for effective interventions for students on the spectrum in the coming years, despite the challenges. Currently, a well constructed study is underway comparing the effectiveness of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) with Pivotal Response. We also expect future research to be more specific in identifying which interventions are most likely to be successful with which subgroups on the spectrum. In the meantime, we can be diligent in our individual research into everything that proves successful for our students and include the essential components of effective interventions into all aspects of their education. ■

Hot, New

Autism Resource Lending Library Created

Laura Stuver, Alpine School District autism specialist and teacher, passed away on August 4, 2007. Laura positively affected the lives of hundreds of students, parents and teachers. Her passing left a huge hole in the ability for parents and teachers to obtain information about and receive help with their autistic students.

As a memorial to her, an Autism Resource Lending Library is being created in Laura's name at Vineyard Elementary in Orem, Utah. We envision that this library will become a center for parents and teachers throughout the state to learn about Autism, to read the latest research and to get suggestions for behavioral interventions, etc.

Donations of money, time or materials to help get this library started would be greatly appreciated. Tax-exempt monetary donations may be made through the Alpine School District Foundation. Those interested in donating can drop off checks made to "Alpine Foundation" to any school secretary in the Alpine District, or mail your donations directly to:

Alpine School District Foundation
575 North 100 East
American Fork, Utah 84003

IMPORTANT:

Make sure to include a note on the memo line of the check specifying the

LAURA STUVER MEMORIAL FUND.

If you have questions, please contact LeAnn Healey at Vineyard Elementary, 801-227-8739 ext.129 or e-mail her at heal271@alpine.k12.ut.us. Thank you for your support.

& Very Cool!!

Public Domain Functional Curriculum For Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Available now, free of charge to Utah schools and teachers. The following are a list of functional curriculum programs that are now public domain. They were developed by Utah State University (Alan Hofmeister) and Project More in Kansas. While some terminology may not be in current use, the processes and content are still relevant. In the near future, these will be updated and made available digitally. Curricula available include:

Parent Training

Every Parent A Teacher

Academics

Number Skills

Number Symbols

Naming Coins

Training for Independence: A program for Teaching the Retention of Important Oral Phrases and Numbers

Understanding Functional Words and Phrases

Suggestions for Using the "I See Sam" Handwriting Worksheets

Spoken Name, Address and Phone Number

Written Name, Address, and Phone Number

Communication / Language

Improving Speaking Skills

Independent Living

Mini Posters: Safety, Basic Skills, Health Care, Personal Hygiene, Parents and the Law, Behavior Management, General Teaching Tips, Communication Skills

Daily Living Skills: Using Deodorant

Daily Living Skills: Eating

Daily Living Skills: Nose Blowing

Daily Living Skills: Toothbrushing

Daily Living Skills: Washing Your Hair

Toilet Training

Training for Independence: A Program for Teaching Independent Dressing Skills

Training for Independence: A Program for Teaching the Independent Use of Zippers, Buttons, Shoes and Socks

Shoes and Socks

Eating and Drinking

Emergency Telephone Skills

Motor Development I: Preskills for Sitting and Moving About

Motor Development II: Sitting and Moving About

Easy Basic Sewing (For Left-Handed Children)

Sewing on Buttons (For Right Handed Children)

For more information or to request copies, please contact:

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- Dan Morgan, Ext. 216.....danm@utahsignal.org

Utah Parent Center

2290 East 4500 South, #110, Salt Lake City, Utah 84117 • 272-1051

- Helen Post, Director.....helenpo@provo.edu

The Utah ABC Triangle: All kids Will Learn through RTI: Response to Intervention

**Plan and act collaboratively and proactively;
the ALL, SOME and FEW**

RTI is proactive, not reactive. ALL students participate in curriculum-based benchmark assessments early in the school year, and all students significantly below proficiency standards are identified. Problem solving teams examine all pertinent data for SOME students, and design interventions for the general education program. FEW students, those who do not respond to intensified instruction, are given even more intensified instruction/intervention.

The triangle has three sides

A = Academics. NCLB requires that instruction be provided, only using Scientifically Based, Research Evidenced curriculum. For example, literacy instruction must address the five components of reading, including: 1) phonemic awareness, 2) phonics, 3) fluency, 4) vocabulary knowledge, and 5) comprehension. Instruction is based on state approved core. Teachers must be well trained to deliver the curriculum with fidelity.

B = Behavior. Behavior problems and academic difficulties are well documented in the research. Sometimes this looks like the chicken or the egg scenario; do the academic difficulties “cause” the behavior problems, or do the behavior problems “cause” academic difficulties? A schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) program addresses this issue, and students who require specialized instruction and support for behavior challenges are identified early. The school problem solving team meets to examine data and design interventions and data collection to monitor progress.

C = Coaching. The challenge of making sure that change “sticks” is not one of a lack of effective interventions. We collectively know the “how” to effect change, but there is often a breakdown in the follow through. Quality, targeted professional development and fidelity of implementation is the key. Research suggests that professional development that includes:

- Theory only = 5-10% use in the classroom
- Theory and modeling only = 5-20% use in the classroom
- Theory, modeling and practice only = 10-15% use in the classroom
- Theory, modeling, practice and coaching = 80-90% use in the classroom ■

RTI: Search for Interventions, rather than disabilities

RTI is a process of systematically addressing academic and behavior skills through the practice of providing high quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs. All students at risk for school failure are identified early in the school year based on benchmark data, not just through traditional individual referral. Site-based teams examine data, and design interventions to be delivered within the general education program. Student progress is closely monitored and interventions adjusted, based on data, to insure student progress. All students who fail to adequately respond to quality, research-evidenced instruction over time are provided with more intensive instruction involving time, frequency, and teacher-student ratios. Students who still evidence significant learning needs over time may be referred for special education consideration.



"We'd better not get on that boat...
It could have a hole in it too."